

Spartan Love: After Dark

by firerwolf

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1. R & R

****Pairing: John/Kelly**
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****Title: R & R****

A/N: This is my first attempt at a M rated story, so please be kind.

John woke to lips pressed against his. He returned the kiss, hands moving to her sides and pulling her toward him. When they finally broke apart John opened his eyes. "Is that your new thing now? Waking me with a kiss?"

Kelly smiled down at him. "I have four years of affection to catch up on, John." Her fingers rang gently over his cheek. "You have a meeting to go to," Kelly informed him.

John wanted to tell her he wasn't going, just hug her close and go back to sleep, but he knew that wasn't acceptable. Their duty had to come first, though right now John couldn't care less about his duty. "Do I need a uniform?" John wasn't sure where any of his gear was. Maybe they'd just want him to be in his armor as the only other clothing he had was what he'd worn the day before.

"Yeah, I retrieved it from your room for you." Kelly placed a quick kiss on his cheek. "It probably won't be a long meeting and I have to go to one anyway. When we're done we can spend the day

together."

John nodded, a bit reluctant. "Promise?" Kelly only let out a laugh and moved away. Kelly moved to a closet and pulled out a pair of uniforms. She lay them down on the bed and John knew the black dress uniform was for him. He made a quick trip to the bathroom before going to get dressed. He stopped in the doorway as he saw Kelly in her uniform.

"If I were you I wouldn't delay. You're going to be meeting with some of the highest ranked officers and they won't like being kept waiting, even if you are the mighty Master Chief," Kelly advised. She finished buttoning up her shirt and moved over to a mirror and checked her uniform.

"You got pants," John observed as he moved over to the bed and started to get dressed. "Do you think you could get a skirt?" Kelly looked back at him, raising an eyebrow. John stripped off his dirty undershirt and slipped on the clean one that Kelly had laid out for him. "You look good in that uniform," John explained as he slipped on the shirt of his uniform and started to button it up. "Skirt would be even better."

Kelly smile and moved over to stand before him. She fixes his collar carefully. "I'll see what I can do." Kelly gave him a quick kiss before moving toward the door. "There's an MP outside who will lead you to the meeting. Ignore his ranting, I'm letting him escort you as a favor." John opened his mouth to voice his opposition but she stopped him. "A favor can be a useful thing, and he is friends with the head of requisition. I could have him get me one of the standard issue skirt."

John considered it for a moment and decided he was willing to put up with the annoyance of a fan to get Kelly in a skirt. "I'll try not to be annoyed," John said as he followed her out the door.

From there John's day went down. The MP wasn't just a bit chatty he was excessively talkative and walked slowly. It got to the point where John just had to keep reminding himself of what he might get out of the favor. The meeting wasn't much better. He officers asked about Requiem, the Didact, and the Cartographer. Mostly they talked amongst themselves. John was physically rested but he still felt tired mentally. He found it hard to focus on their conversations. His mind went to the information the Librarian had given him, on Reach and the old training days, and planning out how he wanted to spend the rest of the day with Kelly.

"Master chief," the gruff voice snapped John back to the conversation. "Do you have anything to add."

John tried to piece together what they had been talking about but it was pointless. He didn't know what to say or even what topic they were on. "No, sir."

The admiral started continue bit a Captain spoke up. "For God's sake, Williams, let the man leave. He just got back yesterday, he must be exhausted after what he's done." John was grateful for the Captain speaking up. He was tired and he wanted nothing more than to leave.

"Very well, you're dismissed, Master Chief," the Admiral ordered.

John stood and left the room. He thought of heading back to Kelly's quarters but realized he didn't know which way it was. John moved over to a terminal and contacted the AI Kelly had mentioned to him. "Gabriel," the white angel avatar appeared. "Is Kelly finished with her meeting?"

"Not yet. She is meeting with Captain Lasky and Commander Palmer to discuss troop deployment to Requiem," Gabriel explained.

"Can you give me directions?" John asked.

"To your left, second right, third door on the right," Gabriel directed. "I don't think they'll mind you popping in."

John moved off down the hallway and found the room. When the door opened he found Palmer, Lasky, and Kelly standing around a holotank with a projection of a Promethean knight hovering over it. "Your teams would be very useful. They'd be able to handle the fast movements. The knights teleport and can do this fast movement toward an enemy. The Rabbits are our best bets against those tricks," Palmer explained.

"Agreed," Kelly decided. "I can commit however many of my soldiers you need." She paused and looked over her shoulder at John. He moved forward to stand beside her. "I didn't expect your meeting to end so soon."

"Sorry to keep her so long, Chief. Just wanted to be sure she was full read up on Prometheans before she committed troops," Lasky explained.

"It's all right, sir. Congratulations on the promotion," John added.

"Thank, though its not really how I wanted it. I always wanted to be promoted because I deserved it, not because the former Captain made a big mistake." There was a look of regret on Lasky's face as he spoke.

"You did deserve it," Palmer cut in before turning back to Kelly. "I'll get the number of troops well be requesting to you by tomorrow. I would say tonight but..." Her gaze turned to John and she smirked suggestively. "Heard you two have already shacked up."

John tried to keep his features neutral but Lasky looked openly stunned, as though not believing Palmer could be so blunt. Kelly kept her calm and changed the subject. "So when do we deploy?"

"About that." Lasky looked a bit pleased. "I was thinking this might be a perfect chance to test the Rabbits on their own, without having a Spartan II leader. I would think that you would have more pressing matters to attend to here on earth." John noticed Lasky glance toward him for just a fraction of a second.

"Don't worry, I promise to bring back most of the Rabbits," Palmer added. "Insert joke about Rabbits breeding here."

Kelly looked to John for a moment and then back to Lasky. "I do have things that need to be taken care of. I'm trusting you with my Rabbits, Captain. I'm sure you won't disappoint. Oh, and Shara, they do enjoy being given carrots when they've done particularly well." Kelly motioned to John and he followed her out of the room. "So, it looks like I've got some time off," she said once they were outside. "What do you want to do?"

"You," John replied without thinking. He frowned, knowing that he never would have said that out loud if he hadn't felt so mentally strained. "Sorry," he muttered.

"Wow, you seem out of it. That wasn't what I was expecting." Kelly frowned and stopped. John stopped as well and faced her. Kelly's hand moved up to his cheek. "You need to relax, John." She pursed her lips as she thought.

"You are how I relax." John lifted his hand to rest over her hand on his cheek. "Being around you relaxes me." John reminded himself that they could be being watched but he found himself not caring. He attributed it to his mental exhaustion and forced himself to pull her hand from his face. "We should go somewhere off base."

Kelly smiled at the idea. "You know I know of a great lake we can visit. Beautiful view, calm and peaceful, and though it's on base it is far away from anywhere that's used." Kelly turned and led him down the hallway.

"I could use some calm and peaceful." John followed her back to her room so they could change out of their uniforms. John was glad to be out of his uniform and the looser fatigues felt more relaxing. Kelly grabbed a few things before they left. She led him across the base to a motor pool where she selected a warthog. "Not a mongoose? There's only two of us."

"Wouldn't want you getting too excited on the way there. We don't want a repeat of the last time we rode a mongoose out of armor," Kelly teased as she climbed into the driver's seat. John knew what she was referring to but decided not to rise to the bait. "Come on, Chief. Let a girl take you for a ride."

John moved around the vehicle and settled into the passenger's seat. Once he was in place Kelly hit the gas and they sped off over the landscape. They were silent for a while and John tried to figure out what to talk about. He stared out at the vegetation as it passed by. This certainly wasn't Reach but the plant life was close enough he might still be able to see this place as a home, as long as the Spartans were there.

When they reached the lake John was starting to feel relaxed. He couldn't think of the last time he'd rode in a warthog without being shot at. The last time was probably all the way back to the drive he took with Kelly back before Reach was attacked. The lake was clear and calm, the grass surrounding it was a brilliant green with a few flowers here and there. John just stood and took in the scene for a moment, glad to see that there were places with this kind of calm. Too many beautiful planets had been burned during the war, too many places like this gone.

A hand moved to his cheek and Kelly forced him to look at her.

"You're thinking about sad things." It wasn't a question and John wasn't surprised that she could read him so easily. His emotions had always been like bright neon signs to her. "Think of the good, like all the times lying in field together when we were kids, or that night we went skinny dipping and I touched you for the first time."

John didn't know why but he blushed at the memory. He shouldn't have been embarrassed, she'd touched him in the same place plenty when they were being intimate but for some reason he was embarrassed by the first time. Maybe it was because that time had been an accident and all the other times she'd meant to do it.

"You're still embarrassed by that?" Kelly raised an eyebrow and John frowned at her. "You know that was the entire reason we put our hands under the water."

John was surprised by the information. "You mean you did that because you wanted to touch me down there?"

"Yeah, it was because of a conversation with Linda earlier that day," Kelly explained. "She pointed out that we'd seen all the guys naked but none of us had ever touched one's genitals when they were naked. We had a bet running for who could touch a guy's junk first and I ended up winning because of that. Got a full sized chocolate bar out of it."

"You mean you felt me up in front of everyone for a chocolate bar?" John really wasn't sure how he felt about his first intimate contact with Kelly having been because of a bet. "Wait, we were playing Marco Polo that night. How did you know it would be me?"

"I didn't. I just had to touch a guy, any guy, as long as they were naked and I touched their dick, and it didn't have to be in front of anyone." Kelly stared out at the lake. "It just happened that way."

"Then you could have touched any guy?" Kelly smirked at him and John realized that his question had come off sounding a bit jealous. He decided he didn't have any reason to hide his defensive feelings and that more likely she would respond positively. "I don't want you touching any other guys." Kelly smiled and John was glad he'd been right. Some women didn't like men being possessive but Kelly seemed to be a hit-or-miss on the subject. Sometimes she liked it, sometimes she thought he was being insecure. He was sure there was a pattern somewhere he just hasn't found it. "If you'd really wanted to win and we didn't have to do it with people around then you could have asked. I would have let you touch me."

Kelly looked at him disbelieving. "You mean back then if I'd asked you to go into the showers, get naked, and let me grope you, you would have let me? I didn't know you were so easy."

John nodded without hesitation. "Of course back then I wouldn't have known that you touching me would feel so good." John reached over and his hand brushed hers for a second. "Though I might have requested to feel you as well, out of curiosity."

"You can feel me up any time, John. I know how good you touching me can feel." Kelly smirked and leaned against the warthog. "Now what do

you want to do, and if you say me again I'm going to force you to watch clouds for an hour until you relax."

John wasn't against the idea of cloud gazing but he'd like to know his options. "What do I get to chose from?"

"Well we could go swimming, or we could lay in the field and just relax for a while, or we could, I don't know, climb trees," Kelly proposed.

"I don't know. I'm still having trouble getting out of a combat state of mind. All I can think is that none of those games would put us in a safe position if we were attacked." John could see the concern on her face and he felt a bit of guilt. He wanted to make her happy, not worried.

Kelly suddenly perked up. "I've got an idea." Kelly moved over to the warthog and grabbed some of the supplies she'd stored in the back. She returned to him with a small rectangular box. She held up the box and he could see the checker patten on it. "Up for some chess?"

"I didn't know you still played, "John admitted.

"I play from time to time. Fred likes to play, and so does Gabriel, though he uses a program to predict my moves so every once in a while I just move pieces about with not real play. It annoys him." Kelly moved to the lake edge and set up the pieces. John was surprised to see that it wasn't a classic set but rather a set that had Covenant pieces. On one side there were elites, blue armored elites as pawns, stealth elites as bishops, field masters as knights, ship masters as rooks, an elite with the two left mandibles missing that John identified as Ralts as the queen, and the Arbiter as the king. On the other side were brutes. Minors as pawns, stealth as bishops, war chieftain as knights, majors as rooks, a clan chieftain as the queen and Tarturus as the king. Of course she'd set it up so he was the brutes.

John sat down across from her and just watched her set it up. "I haven't played this in a while so I might be a bit rusty," John warned.

"Oh, making excuses and you haven't even lost yet," Kelly smirked devilishly. "I'm not going to go easy on you." With that she made the first move and the game began.

Half an hour later John was staring intently at the board, not believing what he was seeing. Kelly was lying in the grass on her stomach, facing the board. "You beat me," he finally admitted. "You weren't this good before."

"Well being in command helped me find the leader in me." Kelly sat up and started to put them back in place. "Rematch?"

John watched her for a minute and nodded. "But can we do it a bit different?" Kelly looked at him, puzzled by the question. He wasn't sure how she would react to the suggestion but he pressed on. "How about we play strip chess." Kelly opened her mouth to voice her objection but John stopped her. "When I'm playing I'm still thinking of combat, Prometheans and Covenant, but I could just as easily focus on each of your higher rank pieces as another piece of clothing I get

to take off of you."

Kelly considered the proposition and nodded. "All right, give me the rules."

"Each time one of us takes the others knight, rook, bishop, or queen we get to take a piece of clothing off the other. Each shoe, and sock are a single piece of clothing along with pants, shirt, under shirt or bra, and underwear. If a person is put into checkmate they have to strip everything. If you get a piece to be promoted then you can put a piece of clothing back on. Clear?"

"Yeah, now prepare to sit naked in an open field," Kelly taunted as she got them started.

"That's where you're wrong. Our first game was like first Contact with the Covenant. I now know how you work and can properly fight back." John moved his piece and waited for her move.

"Oh, you think you know how I play? You have no idea." Kelly smirked and the game got really rolling. "The thing is you're too confident. You aren't used to losing."

"No, I don't lose, and you know that when I do I always win the rematch, particularly if the stakes are higher," John reminded her. "I think you've forgotten why I was leader of the Spartan." John could feel himself relaxing as they played. He had to control himself from getting caught up in his thoughts and making a mistake by breaking his strategy just to remove something from her. He had to stick to a plan if he wanted to win.

Kelly was the first to take a piece that wasn't a pawn. Her bishop took his knight and John had to allow her to take off his shoe. He stuck his leg out for her and she slowly undid the laces of his boot. She slid the boot off, her hand massaging his ankle as she finished sliding the boot off. John pulled his leg back when she finished. He knew that if he didn't she'd continue to touch him and he wouldn't be able to focus.

John hesitated for a second but moved his rook and took her bishop. He held out his hand and she stretched her leg out. He let her leg rest on his hand as he undid her boot and pulled it off slowly. He set it to the side, keeping her leg in his grip for a moment. His hand moved to her feet massaging the sole of her foot. Her toes curled and she let out a slight moan of relief. "Remind me later that I owe you a good foot massage."

Kelly nodded and John reluctantly let her pull her leg back. The game was more intense after that, each of them determined to remove more, though John tried to restrain himself. Forty minutes later they'd both stripped each other of their shoes and socks but Kelly had taken John's shirt and undershirt. It had worked in his advantage as she was more focused on staring at him than winning the game.

"Checkmate," John announced. Kelly stared down at the board, trying to see if he was right. "You were paying too much attention to my king, not watching your own," John pointed out.

"I was paying attention to my king," Kelly smiled at him. "Bad luck, I was only one move away." She moved her rook and John checked,

seeing that she would have had him in checkmate.

"Seems this time you weren't fast enough." John stood and Kelly watched him, confused. He moved to the warthog and grabbed the blanket out of the back, heading back to Kelly. He lay the blanket out and held his hand out to her. "I believe I won."

Kelly took the hand and he helped her stand. "Yes, you won," she admitted. "Why'd you get the blanket?"

"So that way you don't have to put your bare body on the grass. Who knows what kind of ticks there might be," John explained. "Now lay down, I've got an officer to strip."

She stood before him for a second and then lay down on the blanket on her back. John knelt down beside her and his hand moved to the bottom of her shirt. He stopped, his hand moving up to her cheek and caressing her skin carefully. He bit back the question on his mind. She demonstrated her skill at reading him by answering the unasked question. "Yes," she whispered.

Their lips touched, gentle at first but quickly growing in desire. John's tongue invaded her mouth as he fought to explore every inch of her, relearn every bit of her body. Her hands moved to his chest, trailing heat as they carefully moved over the muscles of his chest. He held himself over her as his hands moved to slip under her shirt, slowly making their way up. John had long ago realized that he could apply the strategic skills to these more intimate situations. It was all about choosing the right places to put his hands and mouth to get the reactions he wanted. He moved to kiss along her jaw which caused her to lean her head back, allowing access to her neck.

His hands pulled her shirt up a bit and he removed his mouth from her skin and sat up a bit. She put her arms above her head and he pulled her shirt up and off. He returned his lips to her neck, latching on and was rewarded with a deep moan and her body arching up toward him. He decided to use the chance and slipped his hands behind her to the clasp of her bra. He struggled for a few seconds to try to work it having been never good at getting the clasp unhooked. He felt Kelly's throat vibrate under his kiss more than he heard her laugh. He decided that the clothing could be replaced and with one strong pull broke the clasp. "Hey!" Kelly protested.

She tried to continue protesting but each time she tried to scold him he cut her off with a kiss. "You're better bra-less," he managed to assert. His hands moved over her side and he lowered his head to lavish attention on her chest. Her hand moved to the back of his head, nails starting to dig into his scalp, urging him on. It was no secret to her that he had a particular affection for her chest and she always indulged his desire to spent a bit of extra time on her chest. He pulled away as he shifted and found he was straining a bit painfully against his pants.

Kelly pushed on his shoulder and he let her switch their positions. Her hands moved to his belt as her mouth moved to his chest, lips trailing over his hardened body. She unzipped his pants and he lifted his hips to help her pull them down. She removed them completely, running her hands up his legs as she moved back up. She ducked down for a moment, nuzzling a spot on his left inner thigh. John moaned as she touched him, not at all surprised that she'd remembered his

erotic spots. She moved up a bit and nipped at his abs as she moved up. When her mouth had reached his collar bone John suddenly switched their positions.

John returned his mouth to hers as he pressed their bodies together, letting her feel his arousal press against her thigh. He liked letting her know the effect she had on him, an effect only she ever had on him. His hands moved down to her pants and undid them carefully. He reluctantly pulled away from her and moved down, removing her pants and underwear with ease. He tossed the clothing to the side and started to work his way up her leg. He stopped near the bottom of her thigh and kissed at the flesh, enjoying the little sounds she made. He continued to work his way up, kissing his way up her stomach. He reached her shoulder and kissed at her collar bone as his hand moved between her legs. John worked her body in a practiced, precise manner. It was like a sword fight with an elite. He knew all the chinks in the armor, every place that turned her on, it was just a matter of finding the right combination and using the right tool, tongue, teeth, or fingers, to get the job done.

"John...please...I need you." Kelly's grip tightened on his shoulders and she pressed her body toward him. "Oh...I need you in me."

John removed his fingers from her and moved away for a moment to removed his underwear. Kelly spread her legs enough for him to settle between them. He moved into position and stopped himself. He gave Kelly a quick kiss and leaned down so his lips touched her ear. "I love you, Kelly," he whispered.

"I love you too, John." Kelly pulled him to her for a deep kiss, pushing her chest up against his. "Now...I think you've kept me waiting long enough."

John smiled and pushed his hips forward, sinking himself into her. They started to move, John setting a slow but steady pace to start them off. Their lips collided in passionate kisses only breaking to suck in breaths. John slowly increased his speed and Kelly matched him stroke-for-stroke. John let himself get lost in the pleasure and the joy if the bond he shared with only Kelly. Each touch and action was warm and soft, so human and vulnerable. He'd missed this human feeling so much in those last days of the war, during the fight against the Didact. The fire inside grew as his pace increased and his hands had to move from her body to brace himself and give himself some stability as he moved.

Kelly's nails scratched along his back and her body tightened as his name spilled from her lips in a scream. John continued to move until the fire inside him threatened to burn him alive and could no longer be contained. He finally reached release and stopped his motion. He held himself in place, not daring to move. Kelly was the first to take action, pulling him down for a passionate kiss. John reluctantly pulled himself free and lay down beside her. "Totally worth it," Kelly sighed.

"Sorry I kept you waiting so long." John places a quick kiss on her cheek. "I noticed you have some new scars. I'll have to spend some time getting familiar with them. I don't know what caused the one on your back, but I'd have to guess some sort of human weapon." John had felt the scar when he'd been removing her bra but hadn't seen it so he couldn't be sure. "Then there's the burn on your side," his hand

moved over to trace then outer line of the scar. His hand moved over to a horizontal scar just below her navel. "And this one I'm not sure about."

"Those scars don't matter, John. They're from the past and were in the now." Kelly moved to drape herself over his chest and curled up against his warmth. "I'm just happy you seem back to your old self."

"I told you, Kelly, I lost track of me. All I needed to find me again was some time with you." John wrapped what little of the blanket he could around them and encircled her in his arms. For the first time in a while John felt calm, happy. There was no looming threat of the Covenant or a Forerunner. Lying here in this field with Kelly in his arms Cortana's question seemed to have an obvious answer. He wasn't a machine, he was human. John let the calm sounds of the forest and Kelly's steady breaths help him drift off to sleep.

2. Date Night

****Pairing: John/Kelly**
>

****Title: Date night****

John watched Kelly as she easily dodged out of the way of each and every punch thrown by Holly. It was really just practice of Holly's form as there was no chance that she'd be able to hit Kelly. It had been fun to watch the Spartan IVs try to spar with Kelly and get sent flat on their butts. Since he'd been put in charge of training troops one of his favorite things to do was set up sparring between Kelly and soldiers who were too cocky or were particular problems with female soldiers. He also likes to set her up with talking to female soldiers after finding that they had a boost in effort after.

John waited until Kelly and Holly had finished fighting before he got up and walked over toward Kelly. She stayed back and waited for him to reach her. "Enjoy the show?"

"You mean did I enjoy watching you show Holly up?" John smiled a bit at her and she smiled back. "You want to go to dinner?"

Kelly raised an eyebrow. "You ask me out on dates at the most random times." Kelly laughed a bit. "What did you have in mind, Chief?"

"I told you I don't like you calling me that," John admonished. There was something about her calling him that which he didn't like. He wasn't sure what, just knew it annoyed him. "I don't really have anything in mind. I figured we'd just have dinner together."

Kelly laughed again but this time louder. "So you just want to have dinner together. That might not count as a date. I mean just eating a meal usually is just eating a meal." She shrugged, apparently not as enthusiastic as she had been a moment ago.

"You never seemed to have a problem before when we'd eat dinner together." John didn't know why suddenly their normal date plans weren't enough. "What's the problem?"

"It's just that that's what we always do," Kelly explained. "I know we're limited but—" Kelly looked away from him and John knew that she was going to say something about Fred. She avoided saying anything about her time with Fred when she could.

John had learned that she wouldn't bring those times up, unless he did. "Fred was better at this sort of thing than I am," John admitted. He knew that Fred had always been better at the romance thing than he was.

Kelly sighed but didn't try to avoid it any more. "He is a bit better at the romantic gestures than you are. Not that you don't have your moments or the fact that he's better at romantic things makes me love you any less."

John nodded, understanding what she meant. "I understand, though at the same time I don't really understand what I'm doing wrong with the romance. I thought you were teaching me about that."

"I wasn't teaching you romance, John. I was teaching you how to flirt. There is a bit of flirting to romance but romance is more than flirting. Things like when you take me stargazing, or when you got me that rose some years ago. Those are romantic gestures and I enjoyed them," Kelly explained. "I love you, John, so don't worry about it. Let's just get dinner."

John frowned, not liking that she was accepting his inadequacy at being romantic. She deserved someone that would be able to be romantic. He made a note to talk to Fred about what is romantic. He didn't like talking to the other man about his relationship with Kelly; about as much as Kelly liked to talk about it, but for this he was willing to put aside his discomfort if it made Kelly happy in the long run.

He let her lead the way to the mess hall where they grabbed some food before heading back toward the Spartan barracks. They decided to eat in the commons room seeing as they didn't have a good place to eat in their quarters. They sat in silence for a while until John spoke. "What sort of romantic things did Fred do that you liked?"

Kelly paused in her eating, frowning across the table at him. "I'm not comfortable talking about that." Kelly let out a long breath. "It's just not what I want to focus on. I want to focus on us, the time we have together. When I think of you I don't want to think of Fred in any way other than he's our friend."

John frowned, not particularly happy with her response. "I want to make you happy. If his romantic actions made you happy then I'd like to know what makes you happy." John thought it was reasonable. He didn't see why she would want to hold anything back.

Kelly picked at her food and just stared at it. "It doesn't matter what he's done. He isn't you." Kelly raised her gaze to John. "I'd rather focus on you, on the things you've done."

John was only more confused by her response. "What have I done that's romantic and made you happy?" He couldn't think of any at the moment.

"You've done plenty of things, John. The nights stargazing are

romantic. The rose you gave me, I don't usually get that excited over nothing." She smirked as she remembered the name. John returned the smile, remembering the night well. "When you told me you love me even though you won the game. Those sort of things are romantic and make me happy."

John considered what she'd said. He'd have to think about it for a while but he was sure he'd understand why those things had made her happy and been considered romantic. "I promise that for our next date that I'll come up with something that will make you happy. Something romantic."

"Well you have been doing a good job of keeping your promises. Well, almost all of them." They both knew which promise she was talking about. The one promise that John hadn't kept.

"You can't rush every promise, Kelly." John returned to his food, glad to see that she was returning to her food as well. Their conversation turned to more mundane subjects for the rest of the meal. How the cadets were doing, what the new prototype Kelly was testing was, and what was going on with some of the other Spartans.

When they finished John took their dishes and made his way back to the mess hall to return them. Once he'd dropped the dishes off he stopped as he noticed a crate of supplies that were sitting to the side of the room. John eyed one particular crate and the food inside. He reached into the crate and picked up one of the bars.

"Excuse me, sir. Is there something I can help you with?" One of the staff asked.

John looked back at the man and held up the bar. "I'm taking this." If the staffer objected he didn't speak up. John left the kitchens and made his way back to the Spartan quarters.

When John reached his quarters he found Kelly putting away clothing from the recent delivery of laundry. He moved over to her and held out the bar. Kelly looked at it for a moment before she finally took the offering. "You got me chocolate?"

"You liked it when we were kids," John answered. "I saw it and thought that you'd enjoy some." John moved to the laundry and grabbed out what he knew was his and started folding.

Kelly stared at the bar of chocolate in her hand and turned toward John. "This," she said as she held up the bar. John looked at it but frowned, not understanding what she meant. He continued to fold and waited for her to explain. "Things like getting me this chocolate are romantic and make me happy," she explained. "I told you that you can be romantic."

John shrugged a bit and put away the clothing he'd folded. "I saw it and thought of you." John grabbed the clothing she'd folded and put them away.

Kelly removed the wrapper and bit into the bar. "Mmmm, I forgot how much I love chocolate." Kelly broke off another bit and held it out for John to take. He instead did the first thing that came to mind and leaned forward, putting his mouth over the bit of chocolate and

her fingers. She released it and he pulled back enough that her fingers slipped out of his mouth. Kelly chuckled and took another bite of the chocolate.

John chewed on the chocolate, not a fan of waiting for it to melt. He hadn't had chocolate for many years, and it reminded him of days long gone. Of passing around a bar among the trainees as they all took a bite. It reminded him of stashing a bit extra away to share just between Sam, Kelly, and himself. John finished his chocolate and watched Kelly finish her chocolate. John leaned a bit toward her, Kelly leaned toward him as well and he closed the distance.

John's hands moved to her waist and pulled her to him. Her arms went around his neck and their kissing deepened. They backed up until Kelly's legs hit the bed. They fell onto the mattress and the only thing John was aware of was her mouth working against his and the way her flesh felt under his hands as they worked their way up her shirt.

John stopped, pulling away from her and looking down at his belt. The buckle was undone and Kelly had unzipped his pants. It was a system they'd figured out back during the war. It wasn't uncommon for them to partake in making out or heavy petting when not in their armor but they'd had a bit of difficulty communicating a willingness for more. They'd figured out a system that allowed them to easily communicate to each other if they were willing for more intimate contact.

"If you're ready," Kelly muttered. John hesitated for a moment, deciding if he was ready. Kelly sighed when he didn't make a move. "Well at least we can still make out." She pulled him back down toward her but he stopped himself from being pulled all the way down.

John moved his hands a bit over her bare skin and concentrated on how it made him feel. At a time he would have been acutely aware that Fred had likely touched Kelly in exactly the same way. There was a time when that would have made him feel uncomfortable, but at the moment it was really just a fact in the back of his mind. It didn't make him feel anything, but the warmth of her soft skin under his hand did make him feel something.

John's hands slipped out from under her shirt and moved down to her pants. She watched as he undid the button of her pants and unzipped them. A wide smile spread over her face and John mirrored it. It had been a while but they were back to where they'd been before anything had happened between Kelly and Fred. Whatever discomfort there had been between them was gone and their relationship had healed.

He started out slow, knowing that he couldn't just rush head long into the way they used to do things. Sure you might never forget how to ride a bike but you still start slow after not riding for a year. Though this was the first time he'd really be able to take his time, no deadline to get into cryo or meetings to go to that would cause them to have to hurry. John could feel her trying to increase the force she was using but he still held back. This was a chance they'd never had before and he wanted to take it.

Kelly moved her lips from his so he switched to slowly kissing along her jaw. "Are you having second thoughts?" she asked. John didn't

answer with words, simply ground his hips against hers. She moaned at the force and pushed back. "I'll take that as a 'no'. Then why are you going so slow?"

John kissed his way back to her ear, tongue running along the edge before whispering to her. "I want to take my time, properly appreciate and savor this." He suckled on her earlobe, enjoying the way she moved head to the side so he had more access.

"All right, just wanted to be sure you weren't going to be leaving me hanging." Kelly sucked in air as his fingers found their way under her shirt to trail over her flat stomach. "How are you always so hot?" She muttered.

John moved from her ear to her neck, nipping and licking the sensitive flesh, enjoying each and every taste. He paused as a thought hit him. He knew that Fred had slept with Kelly at least once. There wasn't any jealousy from the thought just a new realization. Before John had gone missing he'd been the only man Kelly had been with, now she had something to compare him to. He wanted to ask if Fred had been any good in bed but he knew better. Bringing up such a thing would only cause problems. Instead he decided he'd just have to up his game. Either he'd been better than Fred and would only put the other man to more shame or he'd establish himself as the better lover now.

Kelly sat up a bit. "Is everything all right?" She was obviously concerned by his sudden stop. She seemed a bit more jump, but he understood. They'd both been tentative about the speed their relationship progressed and, although well aware it was stupid, they both had trouble letting go of some fears that Kelly's previous relation had brought up.

"Everything's fine," John assured her. His mouth moved over her pulse as his hand slowly worked its way up her shirt. Kelly relaxed and lay back down, letting herself enjoy his affection. His hand trailed up her stomach until he felt the cloth of her bra. His fingers slid over the skin, finding their way around back to the clasp. His other hand moved up back to join the other, knowing he'd need both if he wanted to have any chance of success. He struggled with it for almost a minute before he started to get frustrated and he had to stop his other activities to focus on the activity of his hands. John bit her shoulder and growled in frustration.

Kelly's hands pushed him away and he released his mouth from its place on her neck. "John, not so rough," Kelly warned as her hand went up to her neck. John muttered an apology and placed a quick kiss on the mark he'd left. He pursed his lips as he focused on the clasp, closing his eyes to hope it would help his concentration.

Kelly's lips touched his chin and started to move along his jaw. John shifted his head to the side a bit as she moved on to his neck, nipping and sucking the flesh. Like everything Kelly did each action was precise and perfectly placed. John felt her push toward him and he sat up a bit as she sat up as well. He didn't know what she was doing until he felt her hands join his and unclasp her bra. He would have been annoyed at needing help if he weren't so focused on the feel of her mouth on his skin.

John's hands moved down to the bottom of her shirt and slowly lifted

the cloth. He dropped it to the floor and his head dipped down to her collar bone. He trailed his mouth from shoulder to the center of her chest and started to move lower, down the valley of her breasts. His hands moved to the strap of her bra and pulled them over her shoulder, pulling it away from her chest.

With her torso bare his mouth and hands moved to the newly exposed flesh.. He sucked and groped the soft flesh, being sure to take his time and properly enjoy h"every inch he could get to. Kelly pushed her chest toward him, her hand moving to his head and pulling him closer to her. He only moved from her chest when her hand moved from his head, indicating she was satisfied with how much attention he'd given her chest. He would never tire of playing with her chest but Kelly would. John had turned his attention to her stomach when a force suddenly caused him to be flipped on the bed. John found their positions switched Kelly making her way down his body. Her hands moved over his chest and down to the edge of his shirt. He felt her grip his shirt and he sat up so she could pull the shirt off him. She dropped his shirt to the floor and her mouth right away moved to his chest. John let his head fall back and his eyes slowly closed. He focused fully on her mouth moving over his skin, trailing over each and every muscle.

John pushed his hips up toward her, trying to indicate what he wanted. Kelly pulled her mouth from his skin and smiled. "I thought we were savoring the moment."

John smiled up at her, sitting up and wrapping his arms around her torso. "If you want you can continue, you're just making me too aroused." He kissed her jaw, pushing his hips up again.

Kelly allowed them to switch their positions. John moved off of the bed and removed his pants and underwear before he turned his attention to her pants. Kelly moved her hips and legs to assist him with removing the last of her clothing. He moved back into his former position, his lips touching hers slowly as their bodies pressed against each other, enjoying the feel of the contact. John allowed the force of their kiss to increase slowly while his hands explored her body, seeking out the places he knew she liked. He felt a bit of pride at how many he'd remembered.

John shifted on the bed to allow him access to her lower areas. His fingers slid between her legs, teasing her as his free hand moved to her chest. Kelly's hands gripped frantically at his hair and shoulder, her breath quickened slightly and her hips pushed toward him. John slipped his fingers in, moving slowly as he focused on her reactions. He repeated actions that received louder moans or caused her nails to dig into his skin. He slowly increased his speed, ignoring her requests. He didn't stop until her hips bucked hard against his hand and she was screaming his name.

Kelly lay panting on the bed, her body limp. "You've never done that before," she commented. Her hands moved to his chest and lazily moved over his skin.

"Never had the time to do it before," John countered. He ran his hand over her stomach lightly. "Did you enjoy it?"

"Its not fair," Kelly grumbled. "How can you do that and the very first time you're amazing? Where did you even learn that?"

"Not everything soldiers tell me is incorrect. It seems that the key is to have at least one female soldier around." John smiled, hand absently moving over her stomach. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

Kelly smirked at the question. "I loved it, John. The only thing I'd like more is this.", Kelly moved her hand lower until she reached his length and wrapped her hands around him.

John tried to prepare himself but he still moaned at the touch. "Whatever you want," he managed between heavy breaths. John moved between her legs and with her hands guiding him he slid into her. He started slowly as he had with everything else, enjoying a feeling he'd dreamed about feeling again. He alternated between kissing her lips and chest, increasing his force and speed slowly. The pleasure and warmth grew with each touch and thrust. It grew until all thoughts of pacing himself vanished and they moved in unison as they worked toward their climax. Kelly's nails dragged over his chest leaving red lines over his skin. Her body tightened around him and his name spilled from her lips as her body pushed up toward him. John wasn't too far behind her, emptying himself into her before lying down on his side beside her.

Kelly rolled onto her side and cuddled against his chest. John wrapped his arms around her and held her close to him. He didn't even think before speaking. "How was I? Better than Fred?" Kelly frowned and John sighed. "I'm just asking if I'm the best, if I win?"

"Everything is a competition with you," Kelly groaned in annoyance. "John, I love you, so you'll always be the best." Kelly settled back against his chest and she relaxed. "Though that was the best yet." John smirked in triumph. "You know I'll be expecting it to be that good every time."

John placed a kiss on the top of her head. "Whatever makes you happy," John assured her. "I love you, Bunny."

"I love you, Chief runs with Moa," Kelly replied, running a hand lightly over his upper arm.

"That's new," John remarked. "Not bad really, but we used to ride Moa, not run with them," he corrected.

"Too bad we're too big to ride them now. I'd kick your but in a race like she. We were kids."

"You only won because I got kicked in the head by Sam's Moa," John countered. Kelly laughed and he smiled. He ran an hand over her hair in a soothing motion. "It's been a long time since those days."

"Yeah, it has, and a lot has happened. At least something's left after the war that made it all worth it." Kelly buried her face against his chest. "At least we still have each other."

"A lot of long hard fights, beating the odds, and surviving the impossible." John closed his eyes and settled into a comfortable position.

"Totally worth it," Kelly asserted. John only smiled letting himself be lulled to sleep by the shared warmth of their bed.

A/N: First, I think I'm going to do a chapter of this series for almost each of the pairings from Spartan love. Not John/Linda (obviously because Kelly/John is my OTP), Jorge/Emile (because in my head-canon they don't have a sexual relationship), and none of the NobleSix/Anyone pairings (there just isn't a time in the actual game that anything could have happened).

3. Drink

****Pairing: Palmer/Lasky****

****Title: Drink****

****Author's note: This story tries some new stuff and as you read this story if you think it crosses a line then please, feel free to tell me. I'm trying to figure out where the line is, where it is that things go from okay to not okay. ****

The lights were all out, only the screen of the terminal on the other side of the room keeping it from being pitch black. Commander Sarah Palmer sat at her desk, staring down at the pair of glasses on the desk. Her finger moved absently around the lip of one of the glasses as she stared down at the liquor. She hadn't meant to grab two glasses, it was just habit. She would have preferred the drink cooled but she didn't have anything in her quarters that allowed her to keep the bourbon chilled so room temperature had to do.

Sarah stared at the second glass, feeling the weight of her failure. "I'm sorry, I truly am," she muttered. "I came so close, only inches. Could have shot her right there and put an end to that bitch hurting people. If that idiot simply hadn't sent Majestic down I would have been able to get the job done." Sarah put her elbows on the table and buried her head in her hands.

"I remember when we first met. You were still so new to the military but you'd left your mark. Did wonders with the _Hilbert_ in combat and you were helping us stay afloat in the war." Sarah lifted her head. "If I remember correctly I caught your attention. Took some guy to the mat. Don't even remember what he did to piss me off. We went for drinks. Didn't know at the time that bourbon would become our thing."

She stared down at the cup across the table from her and thought about her lost friend. When they'd first met Sarah had been awestruck. Miranda Keyes was one of the women she looked up to, making her own mark and was a great example for young women. Growing up Sarah hadn't had many women in the military to look up to. All the famous people in the military in recent years had all been male so having a female role model like Miranda was a miracle.

They bonded over the difficulties they were having in being taken seriously as female soldiers. Sarah had never realized that rather than admitting that Miranda was good enough to earn her promotions that people were accusing her of only rising in rank because of her father. That conversation led to talking about family. Miranda seemed

to thrill in talking about her father, about his brilliance, and how he had inspired her to fight to be what she was.

The mood sort of soured when Miranda turned the focus to Sarah's family. She outright denounced them but it lead to Miranda questioning her on them which had led to Sarah trying to dodge questions without answering. It wasn't easy as Miranda was persistent but Sarah was just as hard headed and determined not to talk about her family.

What surprised Sarah was that the next time she and Miranda were in the same place the Commander went looking for her. It soon became regular for them to find a way to meet up whenever they were in the same place, or at least once a year talk to each other over vidcom. The one real constant was that from the very start they tended to sit down for a glass of bourbon. Even when separated by light years they both took the time to acquire the liquor before a scheduled communication. As time went on their conversations became more personal and Sarah found herself opening up about her family, and Miranda opened up more about her mother.

This was what Tom didn't understand about Halsey. From Miranda's own lips he heard her explain how she had been a neglectful mother, how she'd never made time for Miranda. She explained how it had stuck with her for years, trying to overcome the idea that she wasn't worth the time of her own parent, but thanks to her father who supported and gave her attention she had managed to pull herself up and have ambition. Sarah was glad that Miranda hadn't lived to see the full truth come out. What would she think of her mother is she knew that not only had Halsey kidnapped children but that she'd had the time and energy to give to them but she had neglected her own flesh and blood.

It was hard to tell exactly when but at some point Sarah had stopped considering Miranda just a friend and started seeing her as a sister. It was nice to have a woman that she could talk to about things she usually had no one to turn to for. They talked about the war more seriously, admitting how bad things were. Miranda was also the first person that Sarah ever talked about men with. Miranda had been the one to point out how serious Sarah was with becoming with Tom, how long they had been together.

It had been four years since Miranda's death but it still hurt to think that they'd never speak again, that Miranda had never see the end of the war. Sarah reached out and took the glass closes to her. "I miss you Miranda," she muttered before downing the drink. Sarah scowled at the taste. It had been too long since she'd drank and the liquor taste bitter on her tongue. She decided to leave the other one alone. She just sat and stared at the glass as she decided what to do.

Sarah stood from her seat and left her room, heading down the hallways. Her feet did all the walking, her head still trying to get things straight. She found herself standing before a door. She knocked but there was no answer. Sarah sighed and hit the controls. "Rollin, open this door," she demanded. The AI didn't question, just opened the door for her. Sarah moved into the room and the door shut behind her.

Tom sat up in his bed and Sarah watched as the sheets slid down his

body and pooled at his waist. She stared at him for a moment, getting the last of her thoughts in order. Slowly she crossed the room and sat down on the edge of the bed, back facing him. Silence settled in the room as she stared at the ground. "Sarah?"

"If she comes back and causes trouble, I'm blaming you," Sarah snapped. "And you better not get in my way or send another team to stop me because if you do we'll have a dead team and you'll be Captain until she's dead." She was scowling at him now, anger on her face but she doubted he could see it in the dark.

"Why does this mean so much to you?" Lasky asked, reaching out and touching her arm. Sarah moved along the edge of the bed, moving closer to him. "Why do you hate Halsey so much?"

"Because I know too much of what she's done," Sarah answered. "I've met the Spartans, good people that can never be free because of the choice she forced on them. I knew her daughter who told me how she'd ignored her flesh and blood, ignored her daughter, in favor of cold science. Because when she contacted Jul she let him know she'd work with him, and you and I both know that's why he attacked, why soldiers are dead, and she doesn't feel bad about a single one of their deaths. Because if she'd told us anything we could have taken military action, they wouldn't have Halsey, and maybe Requiem wouldn't be destroyed. Because the project she spear headed basically means that my parents were right and the UNSC does bad things. Not to mention her talking down the Spartan IVs."

Sarah's gaze turned to the ground as silence filled the room. It was Tom who broke it. "I just didn't want you to have to kill another person." She could hear him moving behind her. His hands settled on her waist. "I'm sorry I sent Majestic to stop you."

"I know that, Tom, but you don't understand. I know you want to save everyone you can but some people aren't worth saving. Halsey is one of them," Sarah stated. She felt Tom set his head against her shoulder.

"Maybe she's not," Tom started. "That's not the point, though. Maybe you do have all those reasons, but I know you well enough, Sarah. You see her as a bad person and you're trying to remove the red from your books. I'm telling you that sort of thing won't fix anything, particularly not anything you've done in the past, or stop the dreams" Sarah knew that he was referring to her recurring nightmares. Tom had asked her several times about them since they had continued to haunt them. She'd divulged that they were about killing humans or watching them die but hadn't been able to tell him more. Everything that haunted her was still under classified status. "Do you forgive me?"

"Don't lecture me, Tom," Sarah snapped. She felt him move, his nose touching her skin for just a second as he positioned himself for her answer. She sighed, knowing that she couldn't stay mad at him, or turn down what he was offering her. "Yes," she finally answered. It wasn't really him that she was mad at anyway, it was herself. She should have shot Halsey a long time ago, shouldn't have missed the shot, and she should have kept the woman locked up in a room as small as a closet where a Knight couldn't fit.

As soon as she said the word his lips touched her skin. Sarah's eyes

closed slowly as he placed light kisses along her exposed neck. She felt him pull the tie from her hair, letting it fall free. His fingers slid into her hair as his other hand moved to the back of her suit. He released the seal at the top of the suit and started to pull the back of the suit open. He leaned forward, kissing along her jaw. Sarah turned her head and their lips met in a heated kiss.

Tom pulled away, his attention turning to her exposed back. His hands moved over her skin, under the suit, and pushing the material away and off her. He pushed it off of her shoulders and she helped him pull it down her arms. Sarah let the upper half of the suit fall down and let her mouth hang open as her breathing became deeper. His hands went to work on her skin, reaching around her and finding her chest while his lips continued to kiss at her neck. Sarah reached back, her hand moving to his head and holding him to her.

Tom slowly moved down her shoulder and then a bit down her back. Sarah kept her arm up, and leaned back a bit. This gave Tom the reach he was looking for. His mouth moved to her chest, lavishing attention on one breast as one of his hands moved to the other. Palmer placed her hand on his head, her free hand moving over his back. She wanted to pull him close like she used to, push him down to the bed but with her strength she couldn't risk injuring him on accident.

Tom moved and pushed her back on the bed as he stood. Sarah sat up a bit and watched him as he moved before her. "Knew I was coming did you?" She asked, looking over his bare body. He had apparently decided to sleep naked that night.

Lasky gripped the edge of the waist of her suit and placed a light kiss on her stomach. "I didn't know, but a man can hope." He pulled down the material and she helped him by moving to try to make it easier to pull it off. Once it was gone Tom returned to kissing her skin, running up her leg and stopping at her hip. Sarah had sat up a bit, leaning back on her hand to watch him. His fingers touched the sensitive skin of her sex and she let out a slight moan to encourage him.

>Tom moved a bit onto the bed, keeping his fingers moving against her as he allowed himself to move up to give her chest more attention.<p>

He was close enough and in the ideal position for her to be able to return some of the affection with little risk. Her hand reached out and moved over his body, enjoying the warmth of his skin under her fingers. Maybe he wasn't built quite as well as a Spartan but he wasn't out of shape. For an officer he kept himself in good shape, a bit of definition but if she was able to do it gently enough to not bruise him she was sure she could find some fat in a few places, though she'd really have to try.

A moan slipped from her lips as his fingers slid into her and her hips bucked toward his hand. He head fall back and she let her mouth open, allowing the moans to flow free. He varied the speed of his movements and she just tried to keep herself from bucking too forcefully against his fingers. "I'm going to have you screaming my name," he said as he nipped at the underside of her breast.

"You'd manage that better if you'd use your cock instead of your fingers," Sarah shot back. Her fingers moved around the edge of one of his allergic rashes. She bucked more forcefully against his hand

as he hit a sensitive spot. She ran her fingers helplessly over his back, trying not to scratch him but finding it hard to resist the instinct.

"Seems I'm doing just fine with only my fingers," Tom shot back. His tone was light and teasing, as it always was when he had the female Spartan under his power. "Though if you're really that eager I'll skip apologizing."

"No," Palmer gripped his shoulders, trying not to use much force but she was fairly sure she had left bruises. "Apologize," she urged.

Tom laughed and placed a gentle kiss on her chin. "If you're so insistent, and you promise not to suffocate me." He started to make his way down, kissing along her body. He made his way across her stomach, stopping in a couple places to kiss at scars or places she'd learned he had an affection for.

Sarah just let her head fall back on the bed and enjoy the feel of him getting lower and lower. His fingers continued to work inside of her when suddenly his mouth joined them and Sarah had to fight not to wrap her legs around him and push him closer. She spread her legs out enough that she could hook her feet around something solid to keep them from moving. It was a pity that the only reason he did this was because she was mad at him because Tom had a talent for it. She moaned and fought not to buck against him as he worked. He continued his actions until the pleasure rose inside of her until it overflowed. His name mixed with moans as she climaxed.

She felt Tom move away from her, avoiding her spasms. He climbed up onto the bed and kissed at her jaw. "I'm going to go rinse, you better be ready when I get back." He nipped at her jaw and moved away. He was going to rinse the taste out of his mouth, knowing that Sarah wouldn't kiss him until he did. They had long ago decided that after oral sex they were obligated to rinse out their mouths when they were finished. Sarah didn't mind it and she really didn't mind not having to taste herself on Tom's lips.

Sarah rolled over on the bed, setting her feet on the floor and used her forearms to prop herself up on the bed. She could hear Tom walking up behind her, a hand moving over her rear. "You know I'm going to have bruises on my shoulder," he said as he leaned down and kissed at a scar on her back from where an energy sword had gone straight through her.

"You said not to suffocate you, nothing about bruising," Sarah shot back. She was going to make another comment but he rubbed his length against her sensitive lips and what she was going to say was lost in a moan. "Damn, don't tease me, Tom."

"Very well then, _Commander_." Tom set the head of his member against her opening and pushed forward. Sarah was well aware of how he tended to progress so she decided to be patient as he slowly pushed into her. Once he was fully in he set his hands on her hips and just held himself in place. At one time he had explained why he did this almost every time. He had explained it at the first thrust being the deepest moment of the bond between them, the moment when she allowed him into her, that moment of intimate trust.

He never waited too long before he started to move, knowing that she'd get impatient. He started to move at a fairly steady pace, enough so that she could start to push back toward him at her own pace. His pace slowly increased and hers with it. She had to be careful to keep her force fairly steady or she might meet his hips too hard and push him back, causing him to pull out, which was exactly what she didn't want. While she had to keep her force regulated Tom's fingers dug into her sides, allowing him to use more force with each thrust. The room echoed with moans, deep breathing, the sound of flesh against flesh, and breathy words of encouragement from the two of them.

Tom reached around her and Sarah gripped the sheets tightly as his fingers found her clitoris and started to rub vigorously. It wasn't long until her toes were curling, her body tightening around him, and his name tumbling from her lips over and over as she came. Tom continued through her orgasm, still working his way to his own climax. It wasn't long before she felt him stop, releasing himself inside her. The two lay, half on the bed, as they caught their breath.

Sarah finally gathered enough strength and pulled herself up fully onto the bed. As she did Tom pulled away from her, also climbing fully onto the bed. He lay down as he usually would have, but on top of the sheets. Sarah settled against his side, draping herself partially over his chest. His arms wrapped around her and the familiar feeling of tranquility washed over her as she settled in. Sarah was tired, warm, and wrapped in the arms of her lover. There was nothing more that could make her happy.

"So..." Tom broke the silence. "Was that apology sex or 'glad to both be alive' sex?" His hand moved up to her hair, playing with the loose strands.

"That was a mix of apology and 'I love you' sex. 'Glad to both be alive sex' is what we're going to do tomorrow in the captain's chair when the bridge crew is in cryo." Sarah gently moved a hand over his chest. Tom laughed but didn't make any indication of if he was taking her seriously. "Thank you," she muttered.

"You don't have to thank me for sex, Sarah. It's not like I don't get anything out of it." Tom placed a kiss on the top of her head.

"That's not what I'm thanking you for." Sarah sat up so she could look him in the eye. "Thank you for caring about me. I know I can be hard on people and it tends to push people away, but it's nice to have someone that cares."

"You're hard on everyone. Soldiers, AI, even your boyfriend. I don't take any of it personally," Tom assured her. "If people would pay attention they'd see that you push everyone and they really shouldn't act like they're something special and you're going after them. Besides, you're a bit nice to people when they do well."

Sarah's hand reached up and rested against his cheek. "I'm nice to you, most of the time. Then again you make me want to be nice." She leaned down and gave him a quick kiss. "That's why you and I are meant for each other. Not only as lovers but for Infinity. You are the gentle nature I don't have, the voice that stops me from making

rash choices."

"So that makes you the rash, forceful, and confident side that I'm missing?" Tom asked. "You think I'm not confident? I am a normal man who on a regular basis pins a Spartan to his bed. How is that not confident."

"You pin me because I let you. If I wanted you'd always be on the bottom, and you'd have to explain to the medical staff why you're covered in bruises and have a fractured pelvis." Sarah settled back on his chest, relaxing against his inviting warmth. "I love you, Tom."

"I love you too, Sarah." Tom wrapped his arms a bit tighter around her as they let silence settle in the room and allowed themselves to drift off to sleep.

4. Words

****Pairing: Tom/Lucy****

****Title: Words****

Tom didn't really like it on the Port Stanley. It was just too unfamiliar, too quiet, and he wasn't sure how much he trusted the soldiers on the ship. They were being restricted too much and he wasn't sure what they were hiding. He would consider looking around if it weren't for the woman lying on the bed with him. Her arms were wrapped around his chest, her face against his shoulder. From her breath he could feel against his neck he could tell she was awake. Tom shifted a bit and Lucy lifted her head. She smiled up at him and Tom let his fingers gently touch her cheek.

Lucy opened her mouth and Tom froze, waiting to see if she'd say anything. Since they'd left the shield world she hadn't said a word and it was crushing to Tom. He'd hoped to finally get her voice back, for her to move forward in recovering. Lucy closed her mouth and frowned and Tom let out a disappointed breath. Lucy sat up and started to sign something. Tom simply looked away, it was the only way to indicate that he didn't want to know what she had to say.

Lucy tapped his chest and gripped his shirt, trying to get his attention. Tom wouldn't turn toward her and acknowledge her attempts to communicate. Lucy moved over so she was more in his view. There was a concerned look on her face and Tom sighed. "Lucy, just don't." Tom sat up and gently pushed Lucy off of him. He moved to the edge of the bed and slumped over, forearms resting on his knees.

Tom could feel Lucy's hands on his back as she tried to get him to turn around. "I just...I'm just hurt, Lucy. Years of trying to help you, get you to talk, but nothing. Then you meet some Engineers for a few hours, they get a little scared, and you talk for that?" Tom didn't hold back the pain from his voice. "I guess I just thought that I meant more to you than something you'd known for a tiny fraction of how long we've been together." Lucy tried to wrap her arms around his neck but he pulled them off. "I just need some time alone." Tom stood and left the room.

He didn't really know where he was going to go, just wander around. He just needed to get away from Lucy and let himself get his thoughts straight. It was hard for him to handle the idea that all their years together meant less to Lucy than a few hours spent with some aliens. He eventually stopped in the hangar, which luckily was empty at the moment. He sat on a supply box and put his head in his hands. It felt like he had been stabbed in the heart but there was no medic he could see to take the pain away.

"Tom?" He turned to see Kelly moving toward him. Now he was embarrassed for having been caught in such an emotional moment. "Are you all right?" she asked.

Tom nodded, turning his gaze back to the floor. "I'm fine, but why are you here? Shouldn't you be with the other Spartans?"

Kelly shrugged. "Maybe, but I wanted some time to think. There are some things I need to think about." To motioned for her to continue. "They won't let us see Halsey and they aren't really telling us anything. I know she kidnapped me when I was needed and lied about the weapons on Onyx but this all seems a bit much for crimes like that. At least we got a world full of Forerunner tech. That has to count for something. At least make it worthwhile that I wasn't there for John." Tom looked to Kelly who's eyes were closed.

"I'm sorry about him," Tom spoke up. "He must have meant a lot to you." Tom didn't really know what to say. He knew what it was like to lose people but the pain he could see from the Spartan II seemed beyond even the pain he'd felt when Kurt had died.

"I don't care what they say," Kelly asserted. "He's not dead, just...missing. I'll find him or die looking. I know John as no other person in the galaxy does. The bond between us is stronger than any force there is and I still feel it, I feel that he's alive." Kelly took a deep breath. "That's not even the biggest of the things plaguing me. Though those things I can't talk about. That damn AI is listening all the time." Kelly looked around them as though she'd find that box AI hiding somewhere.

"You don't like AI?" Tom asked. He'd never really felt one way or another about the programs. They could be helpful but sometimes they seemed like they were mocking life by imitating it.

"I don't like the lack of privacy. I don't want to censor myself all the time because I know there's an ear constantly listening to me. It's just...I don't like it." Kelly scowled and turned to Tom. "You know as a soldier you have to learn to trust your instincts. When something doesn't feel right you have to trust that instinct." Kelly gave him a very serious look, as though trying to burn her words into his mind. Her gaze suddenly turned more relaxed and friendly. "So tell me what's wrong."

Tom froze, trying to understand what had happened. She had seemed like she'd really meant the thing about things not feeling right. It took a second for his mind to process that she did mean it but was trying to cover up the message so the AI wouldn't catch on. He was at least glad to know that his uneasy feeling about the crew's actions wasn't all in his head. He finally managed to answer her question, though he wasn't able to come up with a lie quick enough so he went with the truth. "It's Lucy."

"I would think you'd be happy about her. I mean she's talking again, or has she been talking your ear off?" Kelly asked.

"It's the exact opposite. She hasn't said a word since the first time. She won't even say anything to me." Tom hung his head and Kelly put a gentle hand on his back. "I just don't understand what I did wrong. Years of making her happy, trying to help her, and working to try to get her to talk again and she talks because Halsey scared some floating bags of gas." There was anger and Tom's voice now. "So what was all that effort for? Wasted? Does this mean she doesn't feel the same way about me? Years of our bond which doesn't matter at all but her knowing some aliens for a few hours was all she needed." Tom couldn't help the tears that were running down his cheeks. "For years she's been the only thing that mattered to me but how am I not supposed to feel unwanted when she apparently loves an organic computer more than me? Do you know what it feels like to know the person you love doesn't need you?"

"I do know what it's like. John is an amazing Spartan and all the time I've feared he'd replace me or realize he's good enough on his own. Part of my contribution to Blue Team was I used to take care of any locks that needed to break or any time we needed to hack a system. Then he tells me that he's been given a smart AI, so I don't have to do that anymore. Suddenly you feel like part of the reason they needed you is gone. If the AI could make a hologram run quickly then I'd be screwed. John wouldn't even need me to be his rabbit." Kelly dropped her arm from his back and leaned back, staring up at the ceiling. "Even if he didn't want me any more I'd still love him."

"It's not like I don't love Lucy, I'm just hurt. Maybe I'm just being selfish." Tom didn't know what to think. Was it too much for him to be asking her to speak to him? "I mean I just want one word. Yes, no, turtle. I'd even be happy if what she said was that she didn't love me. I just...I want to hear her voice."

"Usually I'm good with words. John used to say I always knew what to say, but I don't know what to tell you. It doesn't make sense, and you're not wrong to be upset. If I were in your position I'd be upset. You might just have to wait for it to pass. Though, maybe she'll say something to you if you tell her how upset you are."

Tom sighed and stood up. "Well, maybe you're right. I'll leave you with your thoughts. I hope the UNSC hasn't invented mind reading devices." Tom gave her a small smile before he left. He made his way back to the room he was sharing with Lucy. When he entered he found her curled up tight on her bed. Tom decided he wasn't quite over his issues and anger enough to join her and moved to his bed beside hers. He stopped as he realized that there was a paper note on his pillow. Tom glanced over to Lucy before grabbing the note and sitting down on his bed.

_Tom, I know you're mad at me so you'll sleep in this bed. See, you're not the only one that can read the other's mind. I wish I had some reason why what happened happened but there is simply no logic to be found. Even the Engineers said that only my friends could fix me, and I always thought that maybe one day, with your warmth and love, I would be able to deal enough with the bad things and be able to speak again. I always thought you'd be the first to hear my voice

after all these years, and I didn't expect to talk. All the time I shout, knowing words won't come out, and I have no reasoning for why sound came out that time. You mean so much more to me than anyone else in the universe ever could. _

_I want to speak to you Tom but you must realize one thing. You have been waiting years to hear my voice and I've waited years to be able to speak to you again. When I do speak I don't want it to be some meaningless phrase like 'what's for breakfast'. I want it to mean something. I need the perfect words to say. I think I've found the right words, if you're willing to listen. _

Tom stared down at the note, reading it over a second time. He set the paper to the side and stood. He hesitated for a second before he sat down on the bed with Lucy. Tom lay down carefully beside her, trying not to disturb her too much. He wrapped his arms around her waist and she turned toward him. Her eyes were open and she was smiling. Tom couldn't help but smile back. "You had something you wanted to say?"

Lucy nodded, taking a moment to massage her throat and form the words. Tom couldn't help but hold his breath as he waited to see if this time she would actually speak. "I love you, Tom." Her voice was still rough from not being used but in that moment it was the greatest sound Tom had ever heard. He grinned and rolled them over so she was beneath him. Their lips met and he held her tight to his body.

Their kissing became more intense and Tom was fairly sure he'd never get enough. He was sure he could spend the rest of his life lavishing attention on her mouth, that wonderful thing that had allowed her beautiful voice to be returned to him. He was surprised when her body pushed up against his and she tugged on his shirt. Tom pulled back, understanding her normal signal for wanting to tell him something. He was surprised when she instead used him moving back to pull his shirt up and off. She let it fall to the ground and her hands moved to his chest, running over his skin.

Tom's eyes met Lucy's and she nodded, pushing her hips up against his. Tom leaned down and their lips connected again. His hands moved cautiously to the bottom of her shirt. This was something they'd both waited for until the time was right. If Lucy felt she was ready then Tom was ready as well. He gripped the cloth and pulled up, they broke apart and Lucy sat up enough for him to pull her shirt off. His hands slid over her skin, enjoying feeling it like he'd never felt it before. His hands slid around her back and easily found the clasp of her bra. He unhooked it easily and pulled back. Lucy smiled up at him as she slid the cloth down her arms, giving him access.

Tom moved his hands up her hips, over the soft flesh, to her chest. Sure he'd seen her plenty of times in the shower and he'd bandaged up her chest a couple times, but this was different. This was intimate, sexual, and it felt different than any other time. His mouth dipped down to her neck as he started to explore her chest with his hands. He repeated any action that seemed to get a positive reaction from her, trying to learn as he went. He slowly moved his mouth down to her chest, enjoying the taste of her skin but also beating down his own fears that he'd screw up. He found a whole new set of tastes and places to tease, taking pleasure in the way she'd grip his shoulders and buck up toward him when he found a good spot.

He hadn't even realized how aroused he was until Lucy started to grind her hips against his. He moaned at the contact and was forced to break from her chest. She took the opening and her hands swiftly moved from his shoulders down to his waist. She undid his belt and pulled down the zipper. Tom took in a sharp breath as her hand brushed against his erection. She stared down at his open fly, hands moving to his side and gripping both his pants and his underwear. Tom felt nervous about her reaction. Sure she'd felt him aroused before after wet dreams about her and she'd seen him in the shower but she'd never seen him naked and aroused. She pulled down his pants and he saw her eyes widen slightly. Her gaze turned back to Tom. "Can I fit that?"

Tom smiled and shrugged. "I don't know. We won't know until we try." He pulled back from her and stood beside the bed. He removed the last of his clothing and then turned his attention to Lucy. He undid her belt and opened her pants, slowly pulling them down. He made sure they were fully off, waking her socks with it. He then moved up onto the bed again and had Lucy pull her knees up half way. He pulled off her underwear and set himself at her feet.

Tom placed his hands on her knees. "Ready?" Lucy nodded and Tom guided her legs open and he looked down at her fully bare body. He nodded his head and smiled at her. "You'll be fine," he assured her. He moved up into position but realized that he was missing an important bit of information. He didn't know where he was supposed to enter. He didn't want to really admit that he'd never really looked up the specifics. He knew enough though that he knew where to look.

Tom's hand moved down between her legs. His fingers gently touched her sex and he was rewarded with a sigh of pleasure from Lucy. At least he knew that while he was looking she'd enjoy it, his fingers explored, pushing and poking to try to find the correct spot. If Lucy had caught on that he was flying blind she didn't show it. The woman was too wrapped up in the pleasure his exploration was bringing her. After some searching he found a spot where his fingers sank into her. She winced and Tom stopped moving. "Are you all right?"

Lucy nodded. "Supposed to hurt." She laid her head back on the bed and gripped the sheets. "Keep going."

Tom leaned down and placed a kiss on her stomach before he began again to push his fingers in. She winced a few more times but Tom kept going until his finger was mostly in. He stopped there, letting Lucy adjust. When she seemed to relax he moved his finger, slowly withdrawing and pushing it back in. He continued his actions Lucy stopped tensing when he pushed in. He watched her as she reacted to each movement of his finger. He paused for a moment and sighed. "We have two options." Lucy raised her head to look down at him. "We can either work another finger in or we can move straight to the main event. You're the one that's going to be in any pain, so I'll leave the choice to you."

Lucy let her head fall back. "I think we've waited long enough." She gripped the sheets a bit in anticipation. She bucked toward him a bit as he moved his finger again. "It will be less pain in the end anyway," she reasoned. She let out a moan and her toes curled.

Tom removed his finger and set himself in place. He had to grip himself to position himself properly. He pushed forward enough that he wouldn't move and then moved his hands to the bed so he could better steady himself. He slowly pushed forward and stopped when it seemed that she was in too much pain. He would wait until she had relaxed before he'd push in more. He had to be careful and control himself, being sure not to rush and stop when he had to. It felt better than anything he'd felt before and he knew that if he wasn't careful he might move faster than Lucy is ready for.

He worked his way all the way into her and let her adjust to his full size. Once he was sure she'd adjusted he pulled himself almost all the way out. He had to repeat working his way in several times before she became more at ease. He could tell that it still hurt but it wasn't hurting as much as before. As he set a slow pace he could see her becoming more and more comfortable with each thrust. When she seemed fully comfortable he started to increase his pace.

He continued to increase his speed, lost in the pleasure of their activity. He didn't even know what to expect, or what they were working toward. He could feel something collecting inside of him, like working his way up a hill though he didn't know what would happen when he reached the top. Lucy was vocal, not with words but with sounds that he didn't know she could make. When she'd been mute Lucy hadn't made that many sounds unless she had to or they were small natural noises. He certainly had never heard her make a sound like this.

He felt her inner walls tighten around him and she moaned his name. He continued to move until he reached the top of that hill. He felt himself release into her and he held himself still. Tom looked to Lucy who was panting to catch her breath. "Did we do it right?"

Lucy didn't answer right away. She was boneless under him, exhausted. She finally shrugged as a response. Tom slowly pulled himself out, being careful as he didn't have any idea what he was doing. He lay down beside her and Lucy turned toward him, nuzzling her face against his chest. "I don't feel like a complete failure so I'm going to mark this off as a success."

"I love you, Tom." Lucy laid an arm over his waist and made herself comfortable. Tom smiled and hugged her close to his chest.

"I love you too, Lucy." He couldn't help but grin, happy to be able to say that in response to her words. He closed his eyes and settled in, letting himself give in to the sleep that his tired body demanded.

Tom sat in the commons area of the ship, Lucy leaning against him. He was reading over his report about Onyx, wanting to check it over, trying to ignore the soldier that was staring at them. Kelly moved into the room and smiled at him. "See things worked out."

Tom nodded and hugged Lucy to his side a bit tighter. "Everything's good."

Kelly moved over to a table and sat down. She glanced over at, Tom was fairly sure the man's name was Mal. The soldier was still staring at Tom and Lucy and had been since they'd sat down together. "What are you staring at?" Kelly asked the soldier.

Mal turned toward Kelly, seeming a bit embarrassed to have been caught. He looked down at the table for a moment before answering. "Naomi isn't really the warmest of people, and the Captain isn't really what you think of when you think of a Spartan." His gaze turned back to Tom and Lucy. "I guess when you think of Spartans you think of giant robot-like killing machines. I just...I didn't know they could beâ€¦" he motioned toward the Spartan III.

"What exactly is that supposed to mean?" Kelly asked. "I just don't understand what you mean."

"Well...you don't think of Spartans as being able to love," Mal explained.

"I assure you that Spartans can love. I know it firsthand. A Spartan can bust your head open with very little effort but still touch a lover gently." Kelly sat back in her seat and crossed her arms. "We are people after all. Humans, and love is human. "

"I know that," Mal defended. "It's just not what you think about when you think of Spartans." Mal looked uncomfortable. Maybe it was because he had absently been threatened. "You just don't see it at all."

"Doesn't mean it doesn't exist. There are plenty of humans that don't like to show sensitivity but you don't assume that all humans don't know how to be sensitive. Why assume all Spartans are the same? Why assume that just because Spartans are private people they can't love?" Kelly was obviously insulted by what the soldier had said.

"Listen, I know when I've lost a battle, against a Spartan or a woman. I'm going to do the smartest thing to do and leave." Mal stood and grabbed his mug of coffee. He nodded to them and then left. Kelly watched him go and then turned to Tom. He simply shrugged, not sure what to say.

Kelly stood from her seat. "I'm going to see if this place has a gym. Though if it doesn't then I don't understand how any soldier can live on it." Kelly moved out of the commons area and left the Spartan IIIs alone.

"Is she all right?" Lucy asked.

"Yeah, she'll be fine," Tom assured her. "I was upset when you were missing. I can't really blame her for being upset." Lucy looked at him and Tom placed a kiss on her cheek. "Don't worry about it." She shrugged, letting it go. Tom turned his attention back to the report and picked up where he left off.

5. Strip Poker

****Pairing: Lasky/Palmer****

****Title: Strip poker****

Tom sat at the table, frowning down at the schedule in his hand. He liked being first officer of Infinity but it had certain obligations.

Obligations like having to attend every event. He didn't mind the fun run, though he wasn't looking forward to being outdone by Sarah. Most likely she'd take off like a rocket. Fun run or not it was still a race to her. He'd already put in the forms for the valentine's day dance, and he was glad to not be in charge of making a speech on Infinity day. What he wasn't looking forward to was the event after the fun run but before the Valentine's dance.

Tom looked up as Sarah moved into the apartment. The woman moved toward him and Tom shifted to allow her to take her usual position. She sat down on the couch with him and leaned back against the arm of the sofa. "Rough day?" Tom asked, setting the schedule to the side.

"I hate dealing with ONI pricks who can't pull their heads out of their asses long enough to realize what they want is stupid." Sarah groaned and closed her eyes, trying to relax. "So how was your day?" She stretched out her legs at rested her feet on Tom's lap.

Tom slipped off her shoes and held one up for inspection. They were boots, which didn't go at all with her white uniform. He always wondered if she did it just to set herself off from all the officers that she saw as out of touch from ground soldiers. "Rather boring, but that's how shore leave is supposed to be. No stress, just relaxing. Maybe even a little fun with a sexy woman." Sarah smiled at him and Tom's hands went to her feet. His thumb pressed against the soul of her feet and started to rub them. "Maybe a lovely woman in a white uniform that I can tear off her later. Perhaps I'll order in delivery from Golden Eagle, and sit down to watch a romantic comedy. Then, if she's interested, we'll break out the whip cream and make a mess of the sheets. What do you say to that?"

"I say you need to get laid," Sarah answered. "Lucky for you I think I know of a Spartan that might be willing." Tom smirked and pushed her feet off his lap. He moved down the couch and held himself over her. "So what were you reading, Commander?"

Tom set his forehead against hers. "Just reading the event schedule for February. Trying to come up with excuses not to go," he admitted. Tom placed a kiss on her cheek and then her jaw, trying to get things heated up.

"What, afraid I'll show you up too bad at the run or the Captain will back out of his speech?" Sarah's hand moved up to his neck.

"The Captain can't back out of the speech, he'd get in trouble. As for the run I've got some officers that I'm going to run with so I'll be with a group. Besides, once you've finished you can get us a pizza. By the time I'm finished it'll be ready." Tom placed a kiss on her lips, trying to turn the focus to his attempts at affection.

"It would be cold by the time you to finished," Sarah teased. "Though it's not always bad that you're a slow finisher." Her hand moved up to his hair and pulled him down toward her. Their lips met with a bit too much force and Tom winced. Sarah's hands released him and she pulled away as though he were suddenly as hot as burning coal. "Sorry."

Tom pulled away and his hand went to his mouth. His lips hurt but if he was lucky that would be the worst of it. "It's all right," he

assured her.

Sarah sulked a bit, having never really come to terms with how her augmentations restricted her ability to be physical with him. Her eyes suddenly widened and she sat up. She scowled at him as her brow knit together. "You aren't planning on backing out of the Valentine's day dance, are you?"

Tom was surprised by the question. His hands cupped her cheeks and he pressed his lips to hers, ignoring the pain. When he broke apart he answered her. "I'm not missing that dance for any reason. How could I ever pass up a chance to see you in a dress? Though maybe this year a dress that's a bit less alluring. I didn't like how many guys were looking at you last year." Tom hadn't particularly liked the fact that they weren't particularly public with their relationship so he really only got to look at her and have quiet conversations. He particularly hadn't like suffering through Spartans who thought themselves good enough to ask her to dance.

Sarah smirked and relaxed onto the couch. "I suppose I can tone it down. I just wanted to look my best. After all you look better with a good looking woman beside you. Certainly will make you look better than the Captain." Sarah slid her hand back around his neck. "And what better looking woman to make you look good than me?"

Tom smiled, having always admired Sarah's confidence. He knew that in this case it was an act but it left him an opening to complement her. "I suppose if you put a rock next to a diamond that rock will look good."

Sarah's hand pulled him down gently and Tom let her guide him, not that he really had a choice. She directed his head to her shoulder where he nuzzled his head into the clean white fabric. "So then, if you're not avoiding the run, speech, or dance what are you avoiding?" Tom groaned, wishing she would just give up on the subject. "Please tell me you're not afraid of poker night."

Tom considered ignoring her, maybe trying again at getting things started but her hand was toying with his hair which kept him in place. He decided she wasn't going to let the subject go. "I don't like gambling," he finally admitted.

Sarah laughed and Tom enjoyed the way it sounded with his ear pressed to her body. "Seriously?" Sarah asked still laughing lightly. "You're afraid of a little card game."

"I'm not afraid," Tom corrected. "I just don't want to gamble. That and I'm not good at bluffing. I'll lose all my money in a few minutes. I could just watch you play. I bet you've got one hell of a poker face."

"I was an ODST, Tom. Of course I have a good poker face." Sarah moved her hand down to run gently along the back of his neck. "I could teach you," she offered.

Tom raised his head from her shoulder, surprised by the offer. "Really? You'd teach me?" Tom frowned and narrowed his eyes. "What's the catch?" Sarah could be giving but at a time like this she usually wanted something in return.

Sarah smirked up at him and sat up. Tom found himself lying on the couch, the woman having moved fast enough that he hadn't registered her slipping out from under him and flipping him until now. "It's not a catch; you just have to play by my rules."

Tom stood up and watched as she adjusted the recliner they had in the living room. She then moved away and retrieved a deck of cards. They were her favorite, a commemorative set that had images of Covenant and UNSC personnel. Sarah moved back over and sat down on the recliner. "So, what are your terms?" He wasn't sure if he wanted to agree if it meant something unpleasant.

"Calm down, Tom, my terms aren't bad. I'm really just not interested in taking your money. Besides, this is about teaching you how to bluff and pick the right cards." She started to shuffle the cards. Tom just watched her, not understanding. Sarah dealt out the cards and they both picked up their hands. "Have you ever played strip poker before?"

Tom looked past his cards at her and frowned. "That's not fair. I'm awful at this game. You'd have me naked in eight rounds." Tom looked over his cards and furrowed his brow, not even sure what he should be looking for.

"You have no idea what you're doing," Sarah observed. "The idea is that you learn and get me naked rather than me stripping you." Sarah watched him, paying more attention to him than her own card. She sighed and grabbed a data tablet. Tom watched as she looked something up and then handed it over to him. Tom looked at the screen and realized it was basic instructions on playing poker.

Tom read the information and frowned as he realized that his hand was pretty bad. He looked over to Sarah who was studying him carefully. Tom passed her the cards he wanted to get rid of and she dealt him new ones. He sighed, not happy with what he'd gotten.

"I have a pair," Sarah announced, putting her cards down. Tom looked to the set of threes that were in her hand. "You've got nothing." It wasn't really a question but rather a statement. Tom put down his hand and leaned down to untie his shoe. "Both of them," Sarah instructed.

Tom looked up and groaned. "So you'll have me naked in six moves," he corrected. "And you can tell what I have in my hand." Tom pulled off his shoe and set them to the side.

"I can't tell what cards," Sarah corrected. "You're just very expressive. Don't get me wrong I like that you're expressive, but that's bad when you're bluffing. You have to keep emotion off of your face so you don't give away if your cards are good or bad." Sarah dealt out the next hand. "Now, I want you to keep a thought in your head, any thought you can focus on. Something that will keep your face consistent." Sarah took a deep breath and her face went neutral. She looked down at her cards and then back to him. There was nothing on her face that gave away anything.

Tom searched through his thoughts, looking for anything consistent. He thought of his routine aboard Infinity but stopped when he felt bored. He considered thinking of his academy days but tossed that out. For a moment he focused on what it would be like to win a hand

and strip the Spartan he was playing against but had to stop when things heated up in his head and his mental self started doing a lot more than just stripping. He finally focused instead on their nights, sleeping beside each other. He smiled a bit and finally picked up his cards to look at them.

"Better, but let's see if you can keep it." They swapped out cards and Tom looked over his new hand. He could see Sarah watching him which made him frown. "We'll, that didn't last long," she muttered.

"Why do you look sad?" Tom asked. He recognized the look but couldn't place it. Tom placed his cards down so she could see then. "I don't have anything."

Sarah put down her own cards, nothing he could see in them either. "I'm not sad. I was thinking about something serious, not sad." She looked down over their cards. "All right, you won with a queen high." Sarah pulled off her socks and tossed them to the side. "So what were you thinking about?"

Tom blushed a bit, embarrassed. "Sleeping with you," he finally admitted. Sarah raised an eyebrow and smirked. "I mean lying with you in bed. You curled up, my arms around you, and just being comfortable. Seemed to be the one thought I could focus on."

Sarah smirked at him and nodded. "We'll that's a good idea. You look most natural when you're happy, smiling. Serious or frowning looks more troubling. It will also go better with the mood of the night. Not to mention there will probably be chatter at the table." Sarah dealt more cards. "So has that woman, the receptionist in HQ, stopped hitting on you or are we going to have to find an excuse for a public show of affection?"

Tom looked over his cards but focused mainly on the conversation. "She was flirting pretty aggressively the last time I was there, cleavage and all. I think she'll back off now as I made a sort of comment about my perfect Spartan girlfriend. If that doesn't give her a clear enough picture I think the only thing that would convince her to stop would be having sex on her desk."

Sarah laughed and tossed away a couple cards, drawing new ones. "Wow, you're either feeling generous or you're really horny. Either way it's working. Forget about teaching, I'm going to strip you, pin you down to that couch, and have some fun."

"Sure giving me a good reason to just throw away my hands," Tom joked. "Though for all I know your idea of fun involves me on my knees." He picked up his new cards and looked over his hand. "A pair of fours."

"Wow you suck at this game," Sarah commented. "I do have to admit that that does sound like fun. Though I was more of thinking of breaking out the handcuffs again." Sarah put down her hand and Tom frowned at her pair of tens.

Tom slipped off his socks and replied. "Those things do a lot of damage to my wrists. Or at least they did last time we used them. As long as this time I don't bleed. Though are you sure you won't consider the whipped cream?" Tom passed her his cards.

Sarah started to shuffle and looked down at the cards in her hands. "They did hurt you a lot," she conceded, dealing the cards. She looked at her cards but Tom could tell she was disappointed. It wasn't that she was into bondage or anything but when he'd been handcuffed to the bed she had been in control, something that she couldn't do any more. The last time she'd been forceful enough that his wrist were sore and he had to hide the red marks for weeks after.

"Tell you what; if you strip me first you get to use the handcuffs. I have a week to recover and if we wrap cloth around my wrist first it should be fine. If I strip you first we break out the whipped cream and I get to have my own fun," Tom proposed. He looked his cards over for a second, grabbing a pair of cards and passing them over.

Sarah didn't switch out any cards but she did lean over and pulled him close. Her lips touched his cheek gently. "You are such a sweet man." She set down her cards and looked at them for the first time. "Well I've got nothing."

Tom put down his own cards to show that he had almost a flush but one card off. He frowned as he realized that her jack was higher than his ten. "I wouldn't call it sweet, just horny. What would you say if I wanted you to tie me up to the bed and spank me?" Tom pulled his gray t-shirt off and tossed it onto the couch.

"I'd say: I'm sure the cutting board would make a fine paddle if you're really interested." Sarah smirked as she dealt them another hand. She paused for a moment and reached over, letting her hand run over his chest. Tom smiled and flexed a little for her. Sarah looked up to him and smiled. "Good thing I've always been a bigger fan of the pistol than the shotgun."

"Oh, so you think I'm not a shotgun?" Tom asked, faking hurt. He knew he was far from the most muscular man that Sarah could be with but pistol seemed a bit much. "We'll lucky for you I've always preferred the shotgun."

"I have no idea what to make of that," Sarah admitted. She switched out one of her cards and picked up a new one. "How exactly am I a shotgun?"

"Sleek, beautiful look, can kill basically anything with ease, and fits perfectly in my hands." Tom smiled and looked over his cards. "Though I don't get how I'm a pistol. I know I'm not that muscular but it seems excessive."

"Has nothing to do with strength," Sarah corrected him. "A pistol is a reliable weapon that people often underestimate. It is effective, it has never let me down, and I like to keep one close almost all the time." She put down her cards and Tom cursed as he saw the three sixes.

Tom pulled his undershirt off and tossed it over with his shirt. "Do we have to actually do this? Can't you just take off my pants and get started? I mean I'm not going to get off any more than I already have."

"Nope, when you start something you finish it." Sarah shuffled the

cards. "You don't actually want me to spank you, do you?"

Tom shook his head. "No, I was just trying to come up with something." He watched as she felt out the cards. "Would you actually spank me if I asked?" He watched her carefully trying to gauge her reaction.

"If that's what got you going, sure," Sarah answered. Her eyes met his and Tom was sure she was telling the truth. "Though if you were really into pain I'd think letting me be on top would be enough."

"Pain is not the same as a bruised pelvic bone," Tom argued before he swapped out a couple of his cards. Tom looked over his new cards. "So if I asked you to jerk me off you would? What if I asked you to put on a strap on?"

Sarah raised an eyebrow. "If that's what you want," she answered. "Though I wish you'd have a fetish that I didn't have to be really careful while doing." Sarah put down her cards and Tom frowned as he realized all her cards were low numbers.

"I'm not actually into either of those. I just wanted to know how much you were willing to do," Tom explained as he put down his own cards. He had two fives so he'd actually won.

Sarah started to slowly unbutton her shirt. "Tom if you asked me to drop hot wax on you and have sex with you while you're in a cat costume I would if you wanted. I would do anything." As she finished speaking Sarah pulled her uniform open. Tom watched as she arched her back and let the cloth slip from her shoulder and onto the chair behind her.

Tom was aware that she was putting on a show but he wasn't complaining. Sarah knew him well enough to know exactly what got his motor running. "Maybe I'll have you lick the whipped cream off of me."

Sarah gathered up the cards and grinned. "You know I think we have a fresh can in the mini-fridge." She shuffled and dealt the cards. "I do like the idea of whipped cream with a nice Lasky after taste."

Tom looked at his cards and smiled. "I would think you'd prefer chocolate sauce." He picked out three of his cards and passed them over. "We might have a chocolate bar you can heat up."

"You're really trying to get me to just give up on this game." Sarah smiled and swapped two of her cards. She put down her hand and Tom frowned again as she had all low cards.

"If I didn't know any better I'd think you were trying to lose." Tom placed his cards down, a king high and a pair of twos. "Seems you've been getting bad cards."

"Good thing you know better. I was actually going for a flush for last round and a straight this round." Sarah reached behind her and frowned. "Could you help me?" She turned around, presenting the clasp of her bra to him.

Tom smiled, knowing what she was doing. He moved a bit closer to her and undid the clasp. His hands moved up to the straps, pushing them down, over her shoulders. He let it fall down her arms, his hands moving around her torso to cup her breast. He massaged the soft flesh gently as he leaned forward, kissing the flesh of her back. She jumped slightly as he pinched her nipples playfully. Sarah laughed in response which wasn't exactly what he had expected. "Sure you don't want to end the game?" He asked, nipping at the flesh of her back.

"I told you I don't quit things I start," Sarah said, turning in his grip. Tom tried hopelessly to keep her from turning but his grip on her failed. She slid back away from him but she's sat back as she shuffled the cards.

"Come on, Sarah, I'm not learning anything other than that I'm starting to hate poker because its cock blocking me." Tom took the cards that she passed him. He purposefully swapped out his highest number cards, hoping to get lower cards. "There's no way I'm going to do well on poker night."

"There was never a chance you were going to win. But that's not the point." Sarah tossed aside four of her cards for more. "You're not doing it to win the prize but be closer to the soldiers. That's why I'm taking part, and why Del Rio isn't. You only have to do well enough that you get to talk to the people."

Tom put down his cards and watched her. "I suppose you are right. I just don't want to embarrass myself too badly. I mean I just think it looks better if I can bluff."

Sarah put down her cards and she stood up. "You're not bad at bluffing, you just need the right thing to think about." She unlatched her belt and pulled it free. "Are we considering the belt a separate article of clothing?"

"No, belt and pants are one thing. Take it off," he reached out and tugged at the cloth of her pants. Sarah smiled at him but didn't do anything. He finally stood up as well. "Need a little help?" His hands moved down to the waist of her pants.

"I could use some help. I'm a bit distracted." Her hand moved up to his chest, gently touching his skin. "Would you mind?" Her hands moved up to his shoulder and moved forward enough to press her chest against his.

Tom unbuttoned her pants and leaned forward. He unzipped her pants as he pressed their lips together, both actions slow and deliberate. Her arms wrapped around his neck as he pulled her pants down and let it fall to the floor. She held him a bit tighter as his hand moved between her legs, teasing her through the cloth. His hand gently pulled the tie from her hair. "Still want to play?"

Sarah slipped her arms from his neck and suddenly wrapped them around his waist. He had to hold onto her shoulders as she suddenly lifted him up. Tom should feel embarrassed, being man handled like this but he'd become used to it. He couldn't lift Sarah, her muscles were more dense so she weighed more than was normal, and too much for Tom to lift. She carried him through the apartment, to the bedroom. She set him down on the bed and moved up onto the mattress with him. "You

win," she relented. "Who's eating who?"

"Get the cuffs and the cream," Tom said before pulling her down for a kiss. His hands moved over her skin. "We'll call it a tie."

Sarah pulled away from him and smiled. She moved down a bit to sit on his legs, hands moving to his belt. She unbuckled his belt and slid it out. She slowly unbuttoned his pants as her lips gently touched his neck. She unzipped his pants and slid her hand under the fabric. Tom bucked toward her hand as her fingers touched his skin. She pulled a bit away from him. "I only had to win one more round?"

Tom smiled and shrugged. "I felt a bit lazy today." He closed his eyes as she rubbed him again. His hands moved up to her chest, eager to return the feeling. "Are you ever going to take them off or just fondle me in my pants? What's wrong, afraid to look at it?"

"No, just want to be sure it won't look too small when I finally pull those pants down." Sarah sat up and Tom reluctantly let her chest once more leave his touch. She moved to the edge of the bed, grabbing the waist of his pants and pulled them down. She pulled his pants all the way off before she removed her own underwear. She moved over to the bedside table and opened a draw, retrieving the handcuffs, before opening the fridge they kept under the table. They usually kept drinks or snacks in the fridge. Sarah moved over to a dresser and pulled out two pairs of underwear. She climbed up onto the bed again and held up the items. "Ready?"

Tom held up his hands, offering them to her to be wrapped and cuffed. "Oh, you know it."

6. Way 1

Way 1 of 8

****Spit it into her voicemail, a little slurred and sounding like the shot of whickey you downed for courage. Feel as ashamed as you do walking into work in last night's clothes. Wake up cringing for days, waiting for her to mention it.****

The liquid burned as it slid down Tom's throat in one quick rush. Not that he cared; as the alcohol he'd already consumed had dulled his senses to the point that he really didn't feel it all that much. It had only taken two shots to get him buzzed, and in spite of all logic, he had continued. One more shot later and the first two had taken full effect, leaving Tom fully drunk. He had almost no tolerance for liquor, as drinking had never been the sort of activity that appealed to him. The only reason he was drinking now was because he didn't want the top-shelf whisky to go to waste. Tom had bought the bottle years ago, in an effort to emulate the Captains he looked up to who always seemed to drink some kind of hard alcohol. Now he simply wanted to get it out of the apartment, as it was just another temptation Sarah didn't need since she'd stopped drinking completely.

The bigger problem with being drunk though, was that Tom had not prepared for it. He hadn't hidden his keys, stored away his credit number, or shut off his computer. It was too easy for him to access the terminal, open his private messaging account, and find the video

option. Working the camera was a bit more difficult, but still doable - figuring out where to look so he wasn't staring at the desk was the hard part. Now he sat at the terminal, staring at his own image and second guessing what he was about to do. Tom poured another shot from the whisky bottle that sat on the desk into the glass in his hand and quickly downed it, drowning his doubt.

He hit the record button and sat for a moment, swaying in his seat as the third shot really hit his blood stream. "Hey, Sarah, I hope you're safe." The words were clear to his own ears, but actually came out as "Ha Sura, hop um saf." Tom looked to the bottle of whisky and pushed it to the side before he continued. "I don't know why you drank that stuff. It's disgusting. Burns on the way down and leaves a bad taste in my mouth." He laughed almost to the point of giggling. "I'd much rather be tasting you." He ran a finger over the smooth metal of the desk. "I'm not just contacting you to tell you all the things I'd like to do with you. I mean, I could do that if you want but that's not my intentions. I just wanted to tell you that I love you. I'd tell you the reasons why but you'd get bored, 'cause it's a long list." Tom smiled as he pictured Sarah's annoyed face. "Wellâ€¦I'm going to go find a picture of you, think about you, and masturbateâ€¦or put the picture on the pillow beside me and pretend you're home. I do that when you've been away for a long time, but don't tell Sarah. She'd think it's stupid." Tom stood to walk away but stopped as a wave of dizziness washed over him and he fell back into his chair. "Okay, that was unsteady," he muttered, clutching his head. Tom looked back to the screen and some part of his brain recognized the open message. "Oh right, it doesn't know where to go."

Tom tapped the field to enter in who it was for. "To Sarah Palmer," he muttered to himself. The keyboard appeared and he hunted for each letter as he spelled out her name. "S is for sexy," he said as he tapped the s-key, "which she very much is. A is for ass, cause I really like hers. R is for rough, just the way she likes it." Tom grinned and laughed at his own joke. "A is for ass again, 'cause hers deserves being mentioned twice." By this point Tom was laughing between each letter, amusing himself. "H is for hips, which she sways oh so perfectly."

Tom had to pause for a moment and waited for his head to stop swimming. When it finally did he continued having his fun. "P is for pounce, which is what I'm going to do when she gets home. Well I'm going to pounce on her then pound her pussy, so I guess I could have used pound or pussy." Tom lost his train of thought for a second. "Next letter, umâ€¦A, right. A is for ass, 'cause I really can't overstate how much I love her ass. L is for legs, particularly when they're wrapped around me. E is for erection, which she causes. Or maybe it should be for erotic, 'cause she makes everything sexy." Tom shook his head and brushed off his own question. "R is for rear, 'cause her ass is so great it needs multiple names." Tom checked that her name was correct and then hit the send button. He tried to stand up again, but sank back down into the chair a second later, resigning himself to sleeping at the desk.

"I really shouldn't drink," he grumbled before drifting off.

~*~*~

Sarah came home a week later - with only a few scratches and bruises, much to Tom's relief. They lay in bed, intertwined and sweaty after a passionate and forceful session of welcome-home sex. Tom had his face buried against Sarah's neck, and his arms were wrapped around her torso to keep him tight against her chest. Her fingers were lightly toying with his hair while her other hand traced around a dwindling rash from his allergy.

"What part of me do you like the most?" Sarah asked. The question seemed to come out of left-field and caused Tom to raise his head. When he didn't respond Sarah repeated the question. "What part of me do you like the most?"

"Just your body?" Tom asked to clarify. Sarah nodded. Tom lifted himself up so he was face-to-face with his lover. "Your eyes," he answered as he leaned forward enough to rest his forehead against hers.

"Really?" Sarah seemed genuinely surprised. "And here I thought it was my ass."

"Well I could stare at either for hours, butâ€¦" Tom moved a hand from around her and gently touched her cheek. "Yeah, I'm certain; my favorite part is your eyes."

Sarah smiled and placed a kiss on Tom's nose. "You shouldn't drink. You're much sweeter when you're sober." She scooted down a bit and cuddled up to his chest. Tom just lay for a little while, trying to figure out what she was talking about.

7. Way 2

Way 2

****Sigh it into her mouth, wedge in between teeth and tongues.

****Don't even let your lips move when you say it, ever so lightly,
into the air. ****

****Maybe it was just an exhalation of ecstasy.****

Tom ran his hand up Sarah's side, pulling her shirt up slightly in the process. Sarah's fingers slid through his hair, gently holding his head in place. They'd originally lain down on the couch to watch a movie but it was only white noise now, drowned out by the occasional moans and a chorus of heavy breathing. Tom would turn off the movie, but he was unwilling to remove his hands from his lover's body. His hands bravely ventured under her shirt, pulling up clothing as he went higher. Sarah's tongue forced its way into his mouth, moving over his own and spreading her taste with a mix of butter from the popcorn she'd been snacking on.

Spending the evening watching movies really had been their original plan for this evening, but Tom knew Sarah would only be on planet for another day and a half so his mind might have been on more than just that. When the first film had started it had been long and uneventful, and Tom had grown bored. His fingers had started tracing along her waist, really just seeking something to fill his time while

he waited for the movie to get going. He would have been fine with just the small action, until Sarah moved, exposing the flesh of her stomach. Once his fingers touched her skin his attention started to drift permanently from the video. He turned to bury his face into her hair, taking a deep breath. She smelled of strawberries, the shampoo she used specifically because he liked the scent. She must have been just as bored because her hand had moved to his head, sliding through his hair and pulling him closer. It turned from a simple affectionate touch the moment Tom placed a kiss on Sarah's cheek. She turned her head and Tom pressed his lips to hers. That was all it took to get the ball rolling. Before Tom knew it Sarah had rolled over, pinning him to the couch and his hands were exploring her body while their tongues danced.

Sarah's body moved against Tom's, hinting at activities to come. His hands moved to her neck, trying to keep her from moving too far from him. He held her to him in a type of kiss that Sarah had nicknamed "chicken" because it would last until one of them broke for air. When Tom's lungs burned he released her neck and Sarah knew it as the sign that he flinched first. Sarah only moved far enough away so that he could suck in air but her lips still hovered over his, brushing against them to indicate her eagerness to continue.

Tom took deep breaths, trying to full his lungs and get his breathing under control. "How do you always win?" he managed to say between breaths.

Sarah laughed and Tom could feel her lips move as she smiled. "I breathe through my nose. That way I never run out of breath."

"That is cheating," Tom argued. "If I did that then we'd never break apart, neither of us would flinch. Then we'd never get anything done."

"I'm still waiting for you to come up with a negative," Sarah joked. "Although I suppose eventually one of us would get hungry." The way she said the word hungry made Tom think of things that were far from nice meal at the dining room table.

Tom smiled, enjoying her horny jokes. She got this way in intimate situations. "I love you." The words weren't exactly said. His lips didn't move but the sentiment had just slipped out with a long string of air leaving his lungs. Tom froze, not having said it consciously and afraid of how she would react.

Sarah pulled away a bit so she could look Tom in the eye. "What?"

Tom was terrified. This wasn't how he wanted to tell her, not in this situation. If he said it now she'd think he only loved her because of the physical part of their relationship. He loved her for so much more than that, but that wouldn't be how she would see it if he said it now. Tom panicked for a moment before he came up with words. "I adore you," he answered. It wasn't quite love, and she already knew he adored her sexual taunting and her attitude.

"Oh," Tom could swear she sounded a bit disappointed, but any thought on that stopped when she pressed her lips to his and continued their fun. Tom was just relieved that he hadn't screwed things up to a point that he might ruin their evening. She'd told him of too many

former boyfriends who had obviously only cared about her for her body, but he wasn't going to be like that. He would make sure she knew he loved her for her. Sarah's hand slid down and slipped into his pants, cupping him. Tom moaned and put his attention fully on their lips and his hands as they traveled lower down her body.

8. Way 3

Way 3

****Buy her flowers. Buy her chocolate. ****

****Buy her a teddy bear, because that's what every romantic comedy has taught you. ****

****Take her out to a nice restaurant where neither of you feel comfortable and spend the whole night tugging at your tie. ****

****Feel like your actions are more suited to a proposal than the simple confession of something you've always known.****

Tom felt like his tie was strangling him, and he was sure his suit was too small. He really didn't feel like they belonged in a place with people in such formal attire and fancy table cloths. His suit was years old and it showed a bit of wear from not really being taken care of. Tom glanced across the table to Sarah. It had been pure luck that one of her dresses had made it through years of combat and almost constant travel, but it was a bit too small for her as well as she had gained more muscle over the years. Tom did like the way she looked in the slim red dress, but he knew she wasn't comfortable. She looked even less comfortable to be in such a fancy place.

Tom had taken Sarah out to a high-class restaurant, a big step up from the fast food they would usually get if Tom wasn't cooking at home. Sarah had ordered a steak and was cutting into it while Tom had chosen a pasta and chicken dish that was fairly good. He was sure he could make the same thing at home for a fraction of the price. He was also sure that they hadn't cooked Sarah's steak to her preferred standards, as she liked it a sort of medium-rare that was so specifically between rare and well done. She'd always complained that restaurants could never get it right.

Sarah hadn't said a word since the waiter had brought them their food, so it surprised Tom when she suddenly spoke. "Can you just give me the bad news?" Tom looked across the table at her, confused. "Fancy restaurant, flowers, candy, and a stuffed penguin. What is it? Are you dying from some disease? Are you cheating on me? Or are you being permanently stationed on a different planet?"

Tom finished chewing the food in his mouth before he replied. "My health is fine, even my allergies are being managed so I haven't had an attack in a while. The only woman I have any affection for or am sleeping with is you. And I'm not being moved from Reach or from the current ship I'm assigned to," he assured her. "There is no bad news. Can't I take you out for a romantic meal without you being suspicious?" Tom was really just trying to shield her from realizing why they were really here. He had wanted to finally tell her that he loved her, but he was finding the task more and more daunting. He didn't like people being around, it all seemed so unnatural, and now

Sarah was suspicious. He wanted it to be like the old movies he'd seen, where the man tells the woman when atmosphere is just right and it's a big sweeping romantic moment - but this all just felt wrong.

"I've never had a guy take me out to a fancy restaurant just because he wanted to be romantic." Sarah cut through her steak with a bit more aggression.

"From what I heard, the guys you used to date didn't even care enough to be sure you climaxed at least once." Sarah shot daggers across the table and Tom looked down to his plate. "I'm just saying none of them knew how to treat a woman. I'm not like them; I know a good woman deserves a little romance."

"Oh don't give me that shit, Tom. No man butters a woman up with flowers, candy, dinner, and stuffed animals just to be romantic for a night. He only does it if he's got bad news he wants to give a woman and do it in a place where she won't make a scene."

"For the last time, Sarah, I'm not like that. That may be what your old boyfriends would do, but it's not what I am doing," Tom asserted. He was starting to get agitated that she wouldn't let it go. "Besides, I know you'd make a scene even here in a high-class restaurant. I assure you, Sarah," Tom reached across the table and set his hand down, palm up. "I don't have any bad news, nothing that will make you mad, and nothing that will upset you, which caused me to bring you here tonight." Sarah stared at his hand like it was a dog that she wasn't sure was going to bite her. She hesitantly stretched her own hand out and set it in his. Tom gripped hers lightly and smiled softly, trying to reassure her. "Unlike those heartless men before me, I swear that I simply want to be romantic."

Sarah seemed to accept his words and she returned to her food, taking her hand from his. She started to cut into her steak again but stopped suddenly. "Now I get it." Tom groaned, wondering what she'd come up with this time. "This is because I haven't blown you in a while, so you're trying to butter me up so I'll feel obligated to give you head."

Tom nearly choked on the wine he'd been drinking. He quickly grabbed his napkin and held it up to his mouth, trying to wipe away what little had slipped out. "Sarah," he hissed out. "Can you at least be proper enough not to talk about that kind of thing where others can hear?" Tom tried to stop the blush that was spreading across his cheeks. She'd done some embarrassing things in the past, but he didn't expect she would do something like this. "And no, that's not why I did this. I know you only do that to apologize, and for my birthday."

Sarah shrugged slightly before she ate a bit more of her steak. It was a few minutes before she spoke again. "You aren't going to propose, are you?"

Tom was shocked by her question as he hadn't even told her he loved her yet, so marriage seemed crazy to even suggest. It took Tom a moment to collect himself and respond. "No, I don't plan on proposing. I know you aren't ready to even think about that."

"I suppose not," Sarah agreed. Tom was a bit surprised by the response, as it almost sounded like she had accepted only that now wasn't the time to get engaged, not turning down the idea completely. Tom dismissed it as him just over thinking her response. "And just for the record I'm not blowing you," Sarah informed him.

"Noted," Tom said as he returned to his pasta. They ate in silence for a while until Tom realized that Sarah was staring at her wine glass, obviously still thinking about his motivation. He took a moment to come up with something to tell her that would make her relax. He came up with something that would suffice and set his fork down. "Sarah, would you please relax?"

Sarah frowned at him. "I just can't shake the feeling that you have something planned."

Tom wouldn't admit that he did have something planned originally, but that he'd now lost all courage to say it. "It's not like I have many chances to do things that are romantic with you, Sarah. So I have to compact more romance into one night than other guys. It doesn't mean that anything I do that's romantic is a plot."

Sarah smiled and laughed slightly. "Alright, alright...I guess I'm just being paranoid." She shook her head and took a sip of her wine. "Though, just so you know, I find a night in more romantic than going to a place like this. And you cook better." Tom smiled at the complement and once more placed his hand on the table. Sarah placed her hand in his and he squeezed it tightly.

9. Way 4

Way 4

****Whisper it into her hair in the middle of the night, after you've counted the spaces between her breaths and are certain she's asleep.****

****Shut your eyes quickly when she shifts toward you in askance.

****Maybe you were just sleep whispering.****

Tom nuzzled his face into the short brunette locks of his bedmate, disappointed to find that her shampoo's scent had faded so much that he could barely smell it. His hand gently ran over her chest, right below her breast, enjoying the soft skin and warmth of her body pressed against his. He didn't worry about waking her, as she was always a deep sleeper after sex, so he was free to caress her body wherever he wanted. He did this almost every night to soothe himself to sleep, though he'd never told Sarah about it. Something about the combination of the rhythmic actions, the smooth skin, and the warmth helped ease him into a peaceful slumber.

The night had been just perfect, better than Tom could have hoped. The chicken dish he'd cooked for the first time had turned out great and Sarah had nothing but good things to say about it. After they finished dinner they sat down on the couch and watched several episodes of a television series they'd been keeping up with for a while. They had been set on watching as many episodes as they could

while they had the chance, but Tom's plans changed after a particularly steamy sex scene. Tom had started to feel Sarah up and place kisses on her shoulders, indicating his arousal. Sarah had tried to bat him away, telling him to wait until the episode was over, but in the end Tom won out. After a heated make out session on the couch they moved to the bedroom.

Tom could still feel the fresh mark on his back from Sarah getting too forceful. He was fairly sure she kept her nails just long enough to be able to dig them into his skin to urge him on. She always swore it was on accident, but Tom had never tried to get her to cut them shorter. He didn't mind it as long as she didn't hit any of the patches of skin that were irritated by his allergy, but she was always careful of those. Tom placed a kiss on her shoulder where he'd left his own mark in the form of a hickey. His hands moved down as far as he could reach to her hips, running over her pelvic bone.

Sarah shifted in response to the action, trying to move closer to Tom, but pushing him a bit on the bed. He was used to this by now, another remnant of the men she dated before him. She was used to dating bigger men who were harder to move around than he was, so she was often scooting him across the bed. It meant that he often ended up with about ten percent of the bed space as his, with Sarah cuddled up close to him. He would be annoyed by it, but he found it oddly adorable that she was always trying to move closer to him. She had actually knocked him off the bed a few times, but if he wrapped his arms around her Tom found that usually kept him in place. Sarah suddenly shifted, turning around to bury her face into the base of his neck and cuddled up to his chest. Her leg wrapped around one of his and he hoped she didn't push him off now, because if she did they'd both hit the ground hard. Although she was so much taller than Tom, she had a tendency to scoot down so she could snuggle against his chest; which Tom had no problem with as he preferred to be the one being cuddled against, not cuddling against his partner's chest.

Tom counted the time between her breaths, waiting for them to settle back into the calm pattern of sleep. He wrapped his arms around her, nuzzling against the top of her head. "I love you," he whispered. Sarah shifted in his arms and Tom quickly closed his eyes, faking sleep. He tried to keep his breath slow so she wouldn't know he was awake, and when she leaned forward to place a kiss on his cheek he didn't move. It wasn't until she settled back into her place that he tightened his grip around the woman, settling in to try to get some actual sleep.

10. Way 8

Way 8

Author's note: The missing parts are under my story Spartan Love as they didn't need the M tag on them.

****Say it deliberately, your tongue a springboard for every syllable. Over coffee, brushing your teeth side-by-side, as you turn off the light to go to sleep- it doesn't matter where. ****

****Do not adorn it with extra words like "I think" or "I might."**

**

Do not sigh heavily as if admitting it were a burden instead of the most joyous thing you've ever done. Look her in the eyes and pray, heart thumping wildly, that she will turn to you and say, "I love you too."

"Come on you son of a bitch, just die already," Sarah snarled, her eyes narrowed and leaning forward in her seat on the couch. Tom looked over to the screen and the boss battle that she had been trying at for three hours. She let out a growl of frustration as the monstrous creature smacked her character across the game's level. "Damn, get up!"

Sarah had been released from the hospital for a couple days, but as she still wasn't considered in good enough shape to train or go back into service, she was stuck at home. She'd filled her time with finishing video games she'd only partially finished, though Tom worried that the aggression might be bad for her. Not that she would have listened if he'd voiced those concerns. He just tried to make sure he was home in case something did go wrong.

Tom looked back to his book and continued to read, trying to ignore the frustrated woman beside him. She let out a frustrated sound and tossed her controller onto the table. The noise caused Tom to look up and he could see the kill screen. Sarah looked absolutely pissed, and Tom hesitated from saying anything in case her anger would turn on him. He decided he couldn't just sit back and watch her struggle. He set his book aside and reached over, gently touching her arm. Sarah turned to him, her fury evident on her face. "This boss seems to be giving you a hard time."

"You have no idea," Sarah said, standing up from the couch. She moved across the room to the kitchen. "Every time I get him down to the final stage of the fight the damn bastard kills me. I just can't figure out how to beat it." The marine grabbed a water bottle out of the fridge and moved back into the living room but didn't sit down again. "I'm actually thinking of finding a strategy guide for this fight."

Tom picked up the controller and stretched out on the couch, patting his chest to invite her over. Sarah sighed and moved over, sitting down and leaning so that she could lie on Tom's chest. "You never use strategy guides," he pointed out. "Why would you start now?"

"Because I don't have a week to spend trying to beat this boss, but I want to finish this game," Sarah explained. "I just don't have the time."

"Well I can think of a strategy that you can use that isn't cheating," Tom said as he wrapped his arms around her. Sarah looked up to him, obviously not understanding. "You've got a boyfriend that reads up on strategy all the time and is fresh eyes on the fight." He held up the controller to her. "Come on, it's not cheating because we're partners."

Sarah hesitantly took the controller, obviously still a bit unsure about it, but she settled down on his chest, facing the screen. Tom watched as she played through the first two stages of the boss

battle, trying to keep a close eye on the types of strategies that this game used. He'd found that most games kept a consistent system for players to figure out in order to beat levels or bosses. She reached the final section and Tom watched as she tried to damage the monstrosity, but she couldn't seem to do anything. She was able to dodge it just barely but there was no opening to actually attack.

"I just don't know what to do to defeat it. Fuck!" Sarah cursed as the monster on the screen struck her character and she took a rather hefty amount of damage. "What do I do?"

Tom watched the screen looking for anything that might be the trick. "What's wrong with those support beams?" he asked, pointing to the red iron bars that were positioned throughout the level. To him they looked just a bit too bright and caught his eye.

"Those are the bars you make him run into in the second section of the fight before he mutates the third arm," Sarah informed him. She suddenly sat up and stared at the screen, and her eyes a bit wide. She scooted forward, back to her normal gaming position. "How did I not see that?" Tom wasn't sure what she was talking about but she seemed to have figured the level out. Tom sat up and moved closer to her, wrapping his arms around her waist and leaning against her back. She was fully focused on the screen and didn't really notice his action.

Tom watched as she goaded the boss to swing at the support beams, missing a couple times but she finally got it just right and a select animation played of the beam being cut by the force of the strike. "That a girl," Tom muttered before placing a kiss on her shoulder then setting his chin against her back to watch her play. "You're going to kick his ass."

"Damn right I am," Sarah agreed as she caused the monster to hit a second column. Tom watched with baited breath, flinching every time she had a close call. He couldn't help the whispered encouragements as she maneuvered to get the foe where she wanted. He wondered if this was what it was like to see her in combat, exact steps to get an enemy to take whatever action she needed to win. The monster hit the final beam, causing a cutscene to initiate. It showed Sarah's character leaping out of the way as the ceiling above came toppling down, crushing the beast she had been battling. Sarah turned in Tom's arms and suddenly her mouth collided with his. Her hand moved to his head, nails digging into his scalp as she tried to force him closer, deepening the kiss as their tongues explored. When they broke apart Sarah was sucking more air into her lungs than usual and her hand released him to grip the wound on her chest.

"Sarah?" Tom leaned toward her, trying to see if she was okay. He couldn't help the panic he felt as she struggled to breathe. He'd had nightmares of her dying since the injury, which had been particularly horrible until she'd come home. It was just easier to deal with the fear when she was physically there to reassure him she was alive. "Are you okay?" Sarah put up a hand to ward him off, finally getting her breathing in order. "Do you need anything? Water, to lie down, or a medic?"

"Tom, I'm fine, it just hurt a bit," she assured him. She leaned back against him and looked to the screen as the final cutscene was ending. Sarah snuggled back against Tom's chest, a triumphant grin on

her face. "I spent so long playing this level I didn't notice at all that the beams were still a bit lighter in color. They should have become darker after they'd been used."

"I guess sometimes it just takes a fresh eye to notice it," Tom reasoned. "Glad I could help."

Sarah shifted to look up at him. "You and I make a good team. Too bad you'd die if you were an ODS, and you're not!" Sarah trailed off and just relaxed in his arms, focusing on the screen. "You're Navy."

"You say that like it's a bad thing," Tom said, slipping his arms around her waist. "Maybe I can change your mind." His hand slid under her shirt and he shifted her up enough for his lips to move to her neck. "Maybe we can celebrate you finishing that game in a way we can both enjoy." Tom's hand moved up her body, pulling her shirt up slightly to give her an idea of what he had in mind.

"Tom, I'm trying to watch the cutscene," Sarah lied, though she was given away by her hand moving up to his head to hold him close to her. He nipped at the skin of her neck, his hand pulling her shirt up some more to indicate he wasn't deterred. "The doctor said I wouldn't be ready for physical activities for at least another week."

Tom grumbled, knowing she was right and that he didn't want his arousal to cause her harm. Still he found it hard to drop his teasing. "I don't want to do anything to physical, maybe just some kissing, some groping, maybe some fingering, and a bit of penetration." Sarah gently ran her fingers through his hair but otherwise made no indication of acknowledging the affection. Tom sighed, easing off of his actions, realizing that he couldn't risk her health for a bit of fun on the couch. They sat in silence as the credits rolled across the screen. "I could play Mass Effect."

Sarah sat upright and turned to look at him. "Really?" There was a joy in her eyes that was akin to a small child being told they were getting a puppy. Sarah had been trying to get him to play the game for so long, and finally he was agreeing to try. "I'll get the first game in the series." She moved from the couch and Tom missed the warmth of her body. She was crouched before the selection of game chips. It was sort of older tech, but it worked on the newer system she had. She slipped the right chip in and then threw herself onto the couch with Tom. He grunted as her weight hit him and knocked most of the air out of his lungs. She cuddled up to his chest and held up the controller. "You can use my profile so you get the new game perks, unless you want to get achievements."

"I'm not really interested in accomplishments." Tom had taken to calling achievements 'accomplishments' in a mock of his ignorance to video game culture. "I can just use your tag."

"I'll help you choose a class of character that will suit your playing style for the best experience, after you choose a profile and appearance," Sarah offered. She started to go on about the different classes that he could choose from.

Tom watched her as she ranted about the options, though he really didn't understand. He was just captivated by her enthusiasm. Tom wrapped his arms around her and shifted her to a more comfortable

spot but she still continued. When she finished she looked to him, apparently confused by his continued silence. Tom let all rational thought slip from his mind, all hesitation that could cause him to say words like 'think' or 'might', and just let the three words slip past his lips. "I love you."

Tom could hear his own heart beating in his ears and he was holding his breath. "I love you too," Sarah said, smiling and shifting a bit closer. "Now hit start and make your Commander Shepard."

Tom let out his breath and smiled in relief before he hit the button. "So is there a Sarah for me to romance?"

"I guess Ashley is a bit like me. She's a marine that can kick your ass but is also sensitive and likes some less rough things." Sarah reached up and her fingers gently touched his cheek.

Tom set the controller down and moved his hand up to gently grip her hand. He pulled it away and pressed his lips to her palm. "Perfect," he said. He then released her hand, and grabbed the controller.

11. Walk

****Title: Walk****

****Pairing: Fred/Kathleen****

Kathleen finished tying her boot and stood up, glancing over her shoulder. Fred was sitting on the bench behind her, putting on his own shoes. She wished he wasn't coming with her, as she knew he would stop her from running. As soon as she'd told him she was going for a walk he had decided to come with her, having nothing else to do. The UNSC had nothing for the Spartans to do so Fred had nothing to keep him from following her like a puppy just begging to be cuddled and lick your face. Kathleen wouldn't have minded his wanting to stay close if she weren't recovering from a serious injury. She'd forgotten how Fred would fuss over injuries and with no real duties to fill his time he was driving her crazy with always trying to take care of her.

The ODSS barracks were empty for the most part, her soldiers having gone to continue their routine exercise. As Peter had put it, "You could spend a year lying in bed to recover but if we take even a day off we'll fall so far behind you we'd never keep up." Kathleen wasn't sure how true that was but she wasn't cleared for free range to exercise as she was still healing from her most recent injury so she had to take it easy. Kathleen wished she could join them but even Max had told her to take it easy. It wasn't like they had any missions anyways.

A hand touched Kathleen's side and she looked to Fred as he stood beside her. "Are you ready to go, Kathleen? Or do you want to lie down?"

Kathleen smacked his hand off her side and scowled. "I'm tired of lying around." It wasn't that she didn't enjoy the days spent cuddling with him in bed but she'd gotten tired of just sitting around. She turned and moved toward the door, knowing that Fred would

follow. He hurried to match her stride, falling into step beside her as they moved down the hall. Kathleen felt Fred's hand brush hers as he tried to casually hold her hand but she moved away, uncomfortable with showing affection in the public space. Kathleen looked to the male Spartan and could see him frowning at her. "Do you remember nothing about me?"

"We're over forty years old, Kathleen. Is it really that awful to hold my hand?" Fred asked. He grabbed for her hand again but she moved it away. "You'll lay in bed with me around your soldiers but won't hold hands with me in the hall."

"Those are two completely different things. My soldiers are not the public. I wouldn't object to holding hands in front of Linda because we know her. A hallway where anyone can see us is not okay." Kathleen led them out of the building and along the paths that followed the line of buildings.

Fred let out a disappointed huff but didn't argue. He'd been very respectful since they'd started working on rebuilding their relationship. She'd started letting him hold her hand and he'd been sleeping on her bed, mainly because he didn't have his own in the ODSS barracks, but even at night he was cautious about the placement of his arms. Kathleen turned down between two buildings and moved toward the tree-line around the base. As soon as she was sure they were away from prying eyes she reached out and gripped Fred's hand with her own. Fred squeezed her hand slightly but didn't attempt further actions. It sort of frustrated her that he'd fallen into the habit of waiting for her to make the major moves, or maybe he was waiting for her to goad him into making the first move. She'd hoped he'd become more confident and would be more assertive. She would have thought leading the Spartans would have maybe given him more willingness to take action.

They moved away from the base and into the calm of the forest. At least it should have been calm but the last time Kathleen had been in a forest they were assaulting a Flood infected reactor. She tried to just focus on the quiet but instead it made her feel uneasy. This was the same sort of calm that had proceeded her recent injury. She looked around between the trees, searching for the shimmer of a cloaked Sangheili. Fred shifted his hand to intertwine his fingers with hers. "Is something wrong?"

Kathleen turned her attention back to the way they were walking. "Peace makes me feel uneasy, like something dangerous is right around the corner." She glanced to her side as she heard a sound but it was just a bird taking flight.

"Calm down, Kathleen. There's nothing here to attack you and if anything comes I'll make sure that you're safe," Fred assured her. Fred smiled and looked up to the trees. "It's like the forests from when we were young. Most of the things in here are afraid of you, not a threat."

"Fred there were ODST in those forests, ready to kick our ass. That's not exactly safe," Kathleen argued. She pulled her hand from his and Fred gave her an unhappy look. "I hate just walking like this. Why don't we run for a bit?"

"Have the medics cleared you for that sort of activity?" Fred

asked.

"Of course they have," Kathleen lied. Well it wasn't a complete lie; Max had said she could run for short distances if she needed to. "Come on, Fred, afraid you can't keep up?" Kathleen smirked at him, knowing that if she took off he'd follow. Kathleen took off at a steady run through the trees, Fred's heavier foot falls following behind her. She didn't feel any pain as she ran so she kept going for some time, dodging between trees and just enjoying that for once the thing chasing her wasn't out to rip her throat out. She was enjoying herself so much she ignored the pain until her breathing became hard and she was forced to stop.

"Kathleen!" Fred reached her side and placed a hand on her back. Kathleen was partially bent over and her hand was gripping her chest. "Kathleen are you okay?" He leaned down to look her in the eye and she could see concern on his face, mirroring his words.

"I'm just tired," Kathleen assured him. She was really just out of breath, though she had to run nearly as far as she could at full strength. "How far did we run?"

"About three miles, but you were running at top speed," Fred answered. "Is there anything I can do?"

"I just need a moment's rest," Kathleen answered. She moved over to a tree and sat down, back resting against the rough bark. She looked over to Fred who was staring up at the sky, though for what reason she didn't know and didn't care. She was surprised when Fred moved over and held his hand out to her. "I just need a moment, Fred."

"I know, but I know of a better place for us to rest for a bit," Fred explained. Kathleen stared at his hand but made no move to take it, unsure of why they needed to move. "I could carry you."

"Hell no," Kathleen said, forcing herself to her feet. She was surprised when Fred's arm suddenly wrapped tightly around her shoulders and she was suddenly pulled back. An arm slipped under her legs and she found herself lifted up, bridal style, in Fred's arms. She tried to struggle out of his grip but he'd pinned her against his body. "What are you doing, Fred?"

"Carrying you so you don't have to use any energy," Fred answered, ignoring her struggling. "I don't see why you are always so against me pampering you. There isn't even anyone here to see me carry you so why not relax and enjoy not having to exert energy."

"Fred, I've spent the last few weeks not doing anything. I want to use energy," Kathleen argued. She pushed against his chest but didn't really have the energy to break out of his grip. She admitted his grip seemed firmer than when they were young, which she was pleased with.

"We're already almost there, so just relax and enjoy the affectionate action in a private location." Fred moved through the trees and Kathleen decided she was wasting energy fighting him when she was in a bad position to do so. When he finally slowed and moved out of the trees Kathleen looked to the lake that he'd carried her to. "It's far away from where people go and if you need water I'm fairly sure it's safe."

"I'm so happy with your confidence in the water quality, now put me down." Kathleen scowled at Fred and he set her down, cautiously. As soon as she was on her own feet her fist slammed into Fred's shoulder. "You knew that was coming."

"Yeah, I did," Fred admitted, rubbing his shoulder where she'd hit him. "I have to admit, I sort of missed it." Fred's hand moved to her side and pulled her closer to him. "I missed a lot of things about you."

"Oh really," Kathleen said, moving close enough to him to press her body against his. "What else about me did you miss?"

Fred smiled and wrapped his arms lightly around her waist as she leaned against him. "I missed your spirit, the way that you're always so forceful. I missed your confidence and the way you fight back against things you don't like. I missed the violence, a little, but mostly when it's not aimed at me. I missed the way you try to simplify things, just focus on what is at hand." Fred shifted one of his arms so his hand could run up her back. "I missed some more physical parts of you as well," he admitted. "I missed your eyes and how beautiful they are. I missed your hair, and I'm glad to see you still kept it short. I missed those annoyed looks you give me and the way you smile." His hand traveled back down her back and bravely slid under her shirt to touch her skin. "I love how smooth your skin is and how warm you are."

Kathleen bit off a comment about how her skin wasn't smooth, rather broken with scars that he knew nothing about. She liked the praise and just wanted to enjoy it. "Did you miss me?" Fred asked. Kathleen wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged tight to him. She hoped he remembered her enough to understand that this was as close as she could get to explaining that she'd missed him. Fred's arms hugged her tight against him and she knew he understood. After a few seconds the amount of emotion felt uncomfortable and Kathleen released him. Fred took the hint and released her as well. Kathleen moved a bit toward the lake and sat down on the grass.

Kathleen looked up as she heard cloth and she turned in time to see Fred pulling his shirt off. He tossed the shirt down to the ground and crouched down beside her. "Do you want to get a little exercise?"

Kathleen was sure that he wasn't proposing what she was thinking of. "Well, I'm absolutely certain you aren't talking about what I have in my head so what are you actually talking about?"

"I get what you mean," Fred said, sounding a bit proud of himself. "That's not what I'm thinking, though. We're still rebuilding our relationship so I didn't think you'd be willing to do that." Fred unbuckled his belt and pulled down his pants. "I was thinking something a bit more innocent."

Fred pulled down his underwear and Kathleen couldn't help but look to his crotch for a moment. "Doesn't seem innocent to me," she remarked.

Fred crouched down, which caused her gaze to move back to his face. "I forgot how dirty your mind can be, Kathleen." Fred stood up and

moved to the edge of the lake. "I was just going to swim." He bent his knees and dove into the water. Kathleen moved to lay down in the grass, her arms crossed near the edge of the lake, her head resting on her arms. She watched him swim around the lake, the male Spartan moving easily under the water as he followed the edge of the lake. She watched until he got too far away and she just settled in, watching the calm water. The wind rushed over the lake, causing small waves and making the sun sparkle against the reflective surface. She couldn't remember a calm like this since they were trainees, and as she spotted Fred's shadow under the water moving back into view she felt the edge of concern easing away. As he neared where she was Kathleen stretched out one arm and dipped her hand into the water. As he passed she moved her hand down to touch the palm of her hand to his back. The feeling of his muscles moving under her hand brought up old memories, bring up a feeling between her legs she had forgotten her body was capable of.

It had been almost thirty Years since that night but the memory was so clear and her arousal had been so automatic the moment she remembered their time beside that lake. After the augmentations Kathleen hadn't felt those feelings, though she didn't know if it was because of the augmentations or rather because Fred wasn't there to cause them. There had never been anyone other than him and right now his skin was causing all those things to come back like a wave crashing over rocks. A hand gripped her arm and she looked down to Fred's hand on her upper arm. "Kathleen?"

"You need to work out more," Kathleen said, automatically falling back on a sort of insult. "You don't have nearly as much definition as I remember."

"Is that why you couldn't help but reach out and touch me?" Fred asked a half smile on his face. His hand moved down her arm and gently gripped the hand in the water. "Maybe you'll like how this feels better." He lifted her hand and held her palm against his abs. Kathleen felt him flex the muscles under her touch.

She liked the way it felt and she had to admit that she didn't really want to move her hand from his skin. Still he was challenging her and she was never one to back down from a challenge. "It's not bad, but I know where you'd prefer for me to touch you." Her hand traveled down but she was surprised when Fred grabbed her wrist. "What?" she asked, annoyed by him stopping her.

"Kathleen, we're still trying to rebuild our relationship. I don't think that jumping to sex is a good idea," Fred explained. "I think we need to rebuild, take it slow."

"Oh come on, Fred. Why not have some meaningless, passionate sex, and then we can work past any issues." Kathleen tried to move her hand down again but Fred was standing and he had a firm grip on her wrist. "What is your problem?"

"I'm not the kind of man that does meaningless sex," Fred answered, pulling her hand up out of the water. "I'm fine with some teasing but I don't think it's a good idea to go further than that, and that's final."

Kathleen rolled her eyes and yanked her hand out of his grip. "Why are you being a stubborn ass?" Kathleen shifted so she was sitting

up, more even with his standing height in the water. "I'm not going to tease if there's no chance at screwing. I'm heading back to the barracks." Kathleen stood up and started to walk away from the lake. She heard Fred get out of the water and head toward her, but she was surprised by the arms wrapping around her waist and being pulled back to his wet body. Kathleen tried to push him away. "Fred, you're getting my cloths wet."

"Don't walk away from me," he said, face buried against her neck. "Please," he added.

Kathleen sighed, feeling some pity for him. They stood in silence for some time before Kathleen started to feel uneasy. "Will you let me to now, Fred?" His grip only tightened around her waist in response. "Fred this certainly isn't helping things."

Fred reluctantly released her but he was still standing close. "Then what will help things, and don't say sex because I know that's not true."

"It's a relationship, not a warthog," Kathleen said, turning to face Fred. "You can't just go to the supplies and get the parts to fix a problem, it's not that simple. Sometimes some pains need to be left alone, let the wound heal on its own."

"Yeah but I also don't want to scratch at the wound, make it worse," Fred argued. "I get that there's no words or actions that will just fix you being mad at me. I just don't want to make things worse while it is healing. Though from your attitude you've never been one to let injuries heal before doing stupid things. That's why I'm here, to keep you from doing those stupid things. Like running when you aren't fully healed."

"Yeah but being injured doesn't cripple a person, particularly not a Spartan. I ran around with my chest partially split open by an energy sword with no trouble. Wounds don't bring things to a dead stop," Kathleen pointed out.

"And running around with such a bad injury was reckless of you," Fred countered. Kathleen didn't exactly agree with that but then again Fred didn't know the whole situation. "I'm trying to keep you from doing something like that and forcing our relationship to move too quickly."

"How is sex moving too quickly? How is it reckless? I just don't understand." Kathleen crossed her arms, shielding herself as a thought came to mind. "Are you not attracted to me anymore?" Her hand absently moved up just enough to touch the fresh scar across her chest that ended at her left shoulder. "I know I have some big scars but they aren't that bad."

"Of course that's not true," Fred said as his arms reached out, pulling her to his chest. "Of course I'm attracted to you, I just care too much about you to risk out relationship because of the way your touch makes me feel." Kathleen relaxed, laying her head on his shoulder. "Besides, have you looked at me? I'm not really one to talk."

"I assure you, Fred, I have most certainly seen you." Her arms uncrossed and she placed her palms against his chest. "But I've never

shown a dislike for scars."

"If I remember they drove you wild. Some of them are fading, but I could get some more," Fred offered. His hand moved over her back, feeling the scar across her back through her shirt.

Kathleen leaned against his chest, soaking up the warmth of his skin. She hoped he didn't ask about where the scar had come from because she didn't know how to justify knocking a Sangheili, that at the time had still been her enemy, out of the way of a wraith shot that would have killed him. As she thought about it she had a lot of scars that were like that, with stories she either didn't want to, couldn't, or wasn't allowed to explain. His fingers moved along the outside of the marking and she could feel him take in a breath to speak. Kathleen didn't want to answer questions so she blurted out the first thing she could think of. "If you're still attracted to me why won't you fuck me?"

Fred was surprised by the comment and there was a full second of confusion on his face before he seemed to understand the words. "I told you, because you're mad at me. I don't want to have meaningless angry sex."

"I'm only mad at you because you refuse to screw me," Kathleen clarified. "And that's not going to change until you do."

Fred furrowed his brow. "Wait, aren't you still mad about me being an ass?" Kathleen knew he was talking about their first reunion, the one where he didn't know who she was. "Or are you over that?"

"Like Hell I'm over that, but that's beside the point. I'm going to be upset about that for some time, it really hurt, but putting a freeze on our relationship isn't going to help it. That wound will heal over time, Fred, but you can't stop everything because sometimes looking at you hurts." Kathleen lifted her head to look him square in the eyes. "Do you really think our relationship is so weak that me being a bit hurt means I don't still love you? If I was mad enough at you that I didn't love you then I wouldn't have tried to start over. We've spent the last few weeks getting to know each other again, and there's a lot more of that to do, but I still love you. Are you unsure if you still love me?"

Fred moved one hand from her waist to gently touch her cheek. "The one thing I'm sure of is that I still love you, always have, and always will. You can always be sure of that."

"Then you should be sure that were solid," Kathleen concluded. She leaned her head slightly to press her cheek to his hand. "Honestly you're the most uncertain, unconfident person I know. Relationships aren't always easy, and there will be times when I'm mad at you and times you're mad at me. That's perfectly fine, healthy. The only thing that matters is that the love is still there, that eventually we get over the anger, that it doesn't plague us all the time. And I will get over the hurt, because one day I won't see that confused look that caused the pain, I'll just see the way you're looking at me right now."

Fred smiled slightly and leaned forward enough to place his forehead against hers. "So you're not mad at me?"

"I am still annoyed with you, but there's something you can do to smooth things over." Kathleen's hand moved up his chest to his neck, smirking as she pushed her body a bit toward his to get her point across.

Fred hesitated, still doubting if it was the right choice. Kathleen ran her finger along his hairline at the base of his neck, the way he always liked. His eyes closed as they always did when she touched him like this. He relaxed enough that his hand on her waist slid down to her rear. "I think I know exactly what would smooth this all over." His hand roughly squeezed the flesh under his hand. "How about we head to the edge of that lake and reenact your fourteenth birthday?"

"That might be a bit hard, as I don't remember all of this." One of her hands moved down his chest. "As I remember back then you weren't quite soâ€¦firm. Do you even remember how it goes?"

"No, but all the better to make it more historically accurate," Fred joked, his hand dropping from her cheek to join his other hand on her backside. "You sure about this?"

"Says the man who's hands are on my ass," Kathleen pointed out. "Now take me over to that lakeside, let's get down on that grass, and fuck me."

"Sorry, but you know me, always afraid of screwing things up." Fred opened his eyes and smiled slightly, still hesitant.

"Well I know of something that will fix that." Kathleen smirked evil as her hands traveled up his chest to his cheeks. She gently tilted his head and kissed him. It seemed so obvious, but through the weeks she'd never taken the time or gave thought to kissing. His lips were firm against hers, unmoving for just a fraction of a moment. She was surprised at how quickly he returned the kiss, and with just as much force. He opened his mouth and Kathleen didn't even think, just followed his lead as they deepened the kiss.

Much to Kathleen's displeasure Fred broke their heated kiss and seemed to take a step back. "This isn't right." Kathleen groaned and rolled her eyes, annoyed that he was backing out. She let her shoulders slump and frowned at the distance between them. "This isn't good enough."

Kathleen's annoyance suddenly turned to anger and she crossed her arms. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" He was making no sense and his sudden actions made even less sense. "How am I not good enough?"

"No, I mean we deserve better," Fred tried to explain, closing the distance between them and wrapping his arms around her. "The next time we're together it will only be our second time and it will have been over thirty years since our first time. The next time will be a second chance at a first time." Kathleen was starting to understand what he meant. It would be a big event, one that she'd remember as well as their first time. "I just don't feel like this moment is worthy of that. I will gladly roll around by this lake and kiss you senseless, but this moment doesn't feel right. It's not good enough." Fred leaned forward and set his forehead against hers. "That and I should probably look up some instructions, like a refresher

course."

Kathleen smiled, liking the sentiment and accepting his choice. She smirked and pushed against his chest, forcing him to step back. "Damn right you'll need to prep. I'm expecting a better performance than last time." Kathleen stepped around him, sauntering toward the lake. She stripped her shirt and pants with ease, moving to the edge of the lake. "Going to join me?" She asked over her shoulder. She didn't get a response but rather heard running steps and she reacted the moment that she felt a threat behind her. She crouched, turned to face Fred as he ran toward her, and reacted. With ease she struck out at Fred's foot, tripping him, before grabbing his shoulder and tossing him into the water.

Fred resurfaced and looked up to her on the bank. There was an excited smile on his face as he stared up at her. "Never seen you move like that. Where's you learn it?"

Kathleen couldn't help but smile at his interest. She should have expected Fred to take interest in her adapted fighting style. She crouched down beside the water so they were closer to the same height. "It's the ODSS fighting style," she explained. "It's a little Spartan, a little ODST, and a little Sangheili."

"Sexy is what it is," Fred said, moving to set his arms on the grass of the bank. "I'm starting to reconsidered if this moment is worthy." His hand reached out and gently touched her leg. "And you made it look so effortless."

"It was effortless," Kathleen agreed. "I reacted; a soldier has to trust their instincts and natural reactions." Kathleen leaned a little bit closer, smirking down at Fred. "Maybe you can get a private lesson and I can teach you some of my moves." Fred smirked and set his hands on the grass. The Lieutenant pushed against the grass and lifted himself up. Kathleen met him half way. The kiss was soft and sweet, Kathleen's hand moving to Fred's neck and trying to pull him up toward her. Fred's hand moved to her neck and he suddenly started to dip back down into the water. Kathleen tried to pull away but Fred kept a tight grip.

Kathleen was pulled down into the water, pushing Fred away from her after she was under the water. She surfaced and moved a bit away. "You're going to get it, Fred."

Kathleen found herself suddenly pulled against Fred's body before he pinned her against the bank. "Damn right I'm going to get it." His hands moved down to her ass and squeezed roughly. Kathleen was intrigued and surprised at how aroused his actions made her. Her hand gripped his neck and pulled him down, covering his mouth with hers. She slid her fingers into his hair and suddenly gripped his hair tightly and tugged. Fred didn't move away but Kathleen was surprised as he moaned into the kiss.

Kathleen tugged again, this time more forceful and Fred moved his head back to relieve the pain. "That's too hard," he complained. Kathleen released his hair and one of his hands moved to the back of his head.

"You don't get to waffle back and forth," Kathleen said placing a hand against Fred's chest and making him take a step back. Kathleen

wasn't sure how she felt about his reaction to the pain but she'd deal with that when the time came. She moved away from Fred and further out in the lake.

"Where are you going? You wanted me to have sex with you and now you won't let me?" He sounded genuinely confused by it all.

"I'm going for a swim," Kathleen answered, stopping and turning back. Fred stopped a distance away, giving her some space. "I wanted you to screw me, but you refused. Now that I'm past that you suddenly are horny. You missed your shot, Frederic, try again another time." Fred sighed but made no objection or attempts to further the conversation. Kathleen turned back to the middle of the lake and continued out to the deeper water for a swim, Fred grumpily following her.

12. Rose for a Lover

****Title: Rose for a Lover****

****Pairing:John/Kelly****

Kelly rolled her shoulder, trying to ease the slight ache as she walked down the hallway. She'd been clipped by a speeding Ghost during their last mission, and hit the ground at an odd angle; the impact of the fall had put a lot of stress on her shoulder, nearly pulling the arm out of the socket. It was only a dull pain, but it was still better than being hit by the Wraith-shot she'd been dodging when the Ghost had struck her. At least the Ghost had been blown up, and the collision had sent Kelly out of harm's way. Her armor hadn't made it out of the fight in as good of shape however. Several plates had been blackened or melted, and there had been a breach in her under-armor from a piece of shrapnel. Her armor was currently being repaired, which was why she was walking the halls in a tank top and regulation pants. She didn't like the glances that she got from people she passed, but she ignored them as best she could.

She smiled slightly as she remembered once that, in a spur-of-the-moment act of sweetness, John had told her that they stared at her because she was beautiful. He had said it as though it was obvious, a fact that everyone was aware of. He still didn't seem to understand why comments like that made her happy. What he did understand though, was that they were currently both out of armor; which meant that they could spend some time together. John had told her the location of a private room that he knew was open before he'd left to talk to the Captain. Kelly wasn't sure how long it would take for John to finish his report, but she hoped that it wouldn't take too much time.

Kelly reached the door of the room that John had specified and found it to be unlocked, so at least she didn't have to break in. John, though, wasn't there. Kelly sat down on the bed and decided to just wait for him to join her. The room was simple, and Kelly wondered why it was that the room was empty. After thinking about it for a moment however, she decided that she was probably better off not knowing the reason. Instead she just lay down on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. She laid there for some time, wondering if she should undress, get a head start - but she decided against it. It would be awkward if someone other than John walked in. They wouldn't understand, and she didn't want to have to explain. She just thought

about the recent fight, and the reality that John would be particularly clingy. They'd had to break through a line of Wraiths on the ground, and there had only been one way to do it: Kelly had run about the field, taking shots at the Wraiths to get their attention while the other Spartans took them out with quick stealth attacks so that the line of soldiers could advance. John had been reluctant to put her in that much danger, but in the end he was still a Spartan, and they'd had no other option.

It was a longer wait than Kelly had anticipated, which annoyed her, as it meant it was missed time where it could be just her and John. When he finally did enter the room, Kelly frowned at him. "You're late," she complained as she sat up.

John sat down beside her, his hand moving to her thigh out of reflex. "My report to the Captain took longer than I expected. And I did a bit of a favor for someone. I'm sorry that it took me so long, Bunny." His hand absently rubbed her thigh as he spoke. "I did get you something, though."

Kelly looked to the single red rose he held out to her. She was stunned by the sight, having no idea where he'd gotten the flower from. She reached out and took it gently in her hand, smiling slightly. "Where did you get a rose?" It still looked fresh, and as she touched the velvety petals she was sure it was real.

"It's sort of a long story," John started. Kelly motioned for him to continue, interested in what had happened. "As I was leaving my meeting with the Captain, I noticed two women. One was carrying a dozen roses, though she didn't look particularly happy. From their conversation it seemed that a man the woman isn't really interested in bought the flowers from another crew member that is growing rose bushes with the waste water from the ship's hydroponic garden." Kelly knew about the small garden used to grow fresh vegetables for the crew, but she'd never visited it. "The second woman was trying to convince her to take the flowers while she made a report to the Captain," John explained. "She was planning to just throw them away, but the other woman didn't want to take the chance she'd get caught with them. I stepped up and offered to see that they were disposed of."

"And what happened to the other eleven flowers?" Kelly asked, twirling the flower between her fingers. "How'd this become the lone survivor?"

"I threw the rest away," John answered simply. Kelly was a little sad that the other flowers had been wasted, as they were fairly rare. "I kept just one for you. It seemed like a dozen would be over doing it, and would be too noticeable while making my way here."

"John, even this one rose would be noticeable. You could have gotten in a lot of trouble if someone had seen you with contraband like this. What would you have done if you'd been caught with this rose?" Kelly appreciated the gift, but she didn't like him risking punishment for it.

"I stayed to the halls that are least used," John assured her. "If I'd been found with it I would've told them I was heading back to the garden to verify that there were indeed rose bushes before making a formal report."

"If you did that, you'd be ratting out the crew member that's selling the flowers," Kelly pointed out. A part of her knew regulation and felt it was the right thing to do, but it felt wrong at the same time to get another soldier in trouble when what he was doing wasn't really hurting anyone.

"I would inform the proper people if it wouldn't cause them to ask me how I'd found out. I couldn't lie in a report like that, and I'd risk them asking too many questions and possibly connecting it to our fraternization. That would put you at risk of punishment, and it would also risk the team and my position as its leader." John was always cautious of the risks their relationship brought up; and not only to them, but the risks to the other Spartans as well. "The soldier is using ship resources for personal gain - as a way to get money from other soldiers. It seems logical that he should be stopped."

"Maybe you can tell a half-truth and report him," Kelly said, seeing his point. "You could say that you'd heard about it from other soldiers talking and then investigated. It would still be true, and you don't have to mention the roses at all except for the bushes." It would allow John to still do the right thing and turn in the person for selling the flowers, while avoiding the risk.

"I think that would be reasonable." John smiled and leaned over, placing a kiss on her cheek. "This is why I need you, Bunny. You're a creative thinker, and skilled at working around problems like this."

"You do the same thing when we're in combat," Kelly argued.

"But I'm only skilled at it when it comes to combat," John countered. "I don't have the skill when off the battlefield the way you do." John's hand moved from her thigh to slip around her waist, pulling her closer. "You are skilled at the things I'm not, and some of the things I am good at too."

"Well, they say everyone has a soul mate out there that fits with them. I always believed that meant they were enough like you so you got along, but filled in the gaps where you lacked. Like you do for me," Kelly explained.

John frowned slightly and furrowed his brow. "Other than your reluctance to report injuries, what flaws do you have?" From the look on his face he was serious, not seeing where she was lacking. Kelly smiled and she leaned toward him, her free hand touching his cheek lightly and guiding him closer. As soon as their lips touched John's free hand went to her neck, pulling her close. They parted a few seconds later and John nuzzled against her neck. "Can we cuddle now?"

Kelly let her hand travel to his shoulder, looking to the rose she was still holding. "No," she said as she tossed the rose over her shoulder. John lifted his head and he looked hurt by her rejection. Kelly smiled and her hand slid down from his shoulder and moved down his chest. "I don't want to cuddle just yet." Her hand reached his waist and was quickly joined by the other as she unbuckled his belt and unzipped his pants. "We can cuddle later."

John hesitated for a fraction of a second, so briefly that only Kelly would ever have noticed it, before he leaned forward, kissing her soundly as he caressed her sides with his hands. This was how John tested the waters to see how aroused he was likely to become, like testing the blade of a knife before risking your life using it. He pulled her a bit closer, his hands moving down her sides to her hips, all good signs. She was surprised, though, as his hands moved to the front of her pants and he unbuttoned them, pulling the zipper down. It usually took John more time before deciding to move forward, and Kelly wondered if there was some external variable she hadn't considered.

Those thoughts were cut off as John's hands moved back to Kelly's waist and his hands slid her shirt up enough for him to touch skin. Kelly scooted back on the bed, moving away from John and more onto the mattress. John stood slightly, enough for Kelly to get a leg up onto the bed, allowing John to settle between it and the leg that was still over the edge. He looked at her, waiting patiently for direction as to what he should do. Kelly's hand reached out and grabbed the collar of his shirt, pulling him toward her as she leaned backward. He quickly leaned forward enough to cross the gap, and once more placed one hand on her thigh to steady himself and shift a leg onto the bed. Kelly's hand moved to the back of his head to keep him close as she leaned back all the way. John's hand moved from her thigh to the bed to better hold himself above her. Kelly tugged on his shirt, but he was an unmovable object, strong and sturdy above her. Kelly's nails lightly scratched over the back of his neck, just a little so she wouldn't leave a mark, while trying to keep up with his mouth as he kissed her hungrily.

Kelly tugged on his shirt again, harder this time in an attempt to get his body closer, but she was rewarded only with a tearing sound. John broke the kiss and sat up enough to pull his shirt off. He tossed it to the side and she saw him pick up the rose off the mattress, lightly tossing it out of the way as well. He then returned to his former position, his mouth once more latching onto hers. Kelly's hand moved around to his back, fighting not to scratch at him, while her other hand trailed down his chest. She felt his firm muscles move under her fingers as he shifted, pushing her shirt up a bit higher. Kelly reluctantly removed her hands from his body and grabbed the hem of her tank top. As she pulled her shirt up John suddenly pulled away from her, moving lower on the bed. His warm lips touched her stomach along the line of her ribs, in perfect contrast with the cold touch of his dog tags as they landed just below her navel. Kelly pulled her shirt all the way off and dropped it to the floor, her full attention on the lips that were touching her skin. She couldn't tell if John was actually moving slowly, or if her heightened senses had just made time seem to slow. Time seemed to get fuzzy whenever John was kissing any part of her.

John kissed higher and higher until he came to the underside of her breasts. He paused for a moment and smiled against her skin. "Thank you," he said before he continued higher, exploring her exposed chest. John moved one hand to her waist, keeping her in place as his other hand moved to the free breast, his fingers squeezing lightly as he enjoyed the soft flesh. Kelly just let her head fall back, enjoying the kissing, nipping, and sucking as John made sure every centimeter of her chest got some attention. Kelly could have let him continue for hours, as he would never tire of exploring her breasts, but the heat between her legs made it clear she needed more. Kelly's

hand went to his hair, tugging it lightly, a simple sign for him to continue on. John didn't move right away, and he gave each nipple one last kiss as though thanking them before he started to kiss higher on her torso. He kissed along her collar bone to her shoulder as his hands moved to her pants, starting to pull them down. Kelly lifted her hips so that he could remove the clothing.

John stood and finished pulling off her pants, dropping them to the floor. He removed his own pants before he climbed back onto the bed. He stopped as Kelly reached up, putting a hand on his shoulder and guiding him to turn over, switching their positions. Kelly moved to straddle him, setting her hands on his chest, letting her fingers trail over his well-defined muscles. John's hands moved up her arms slowly, gently, as he settled into a comfortable position. Kelly leaned down, kissing him as she continued to explore his skin with her hands and her hips started to rock. She could already feel how aroused he was, his length pressing against his underwear, asking to be let free. Kelly ground her hips against his erection, pleased with the moan she elicited from him.

Kelly continued to move against him, enjoying the sounds that were so unique to John; moans that he tried to bite back so he wasn't too loud, deep breaths of focus and control, and half managed attempts at saying her name. It helped that the contact was stoking her own arousal, causing her to move slightly faster and with more force. John's hands moved to her thighs and he gripped her skin a bit tighter than Kelly would have liked, but it wasn't hard enough that it would leave any marks. John tried several times to manage her name, only getting half way through before it was lost in another deep sigh. He had apparently been trying to tell her something, when suddenly he was sitting up, and with a feat of strength that reminded Kelly exactly how much stronger he was than her, he flipped their positions. Kelly then found herself pushed down against the mattress, John forcefully moving his hips against hers. His mouth moved against her neck and shoulder as his hands travelled to her waist, grabbing the edge of her underwear.

John's mouth was suddenly gone; he'd moved down and was tugging Kelly's underwear down her legs. She straightened her legs as best she could, trying to ease his task. He managed to get them off, quickly removing his own underwear before he moved back into his former position. John leaned down and Kelly reached up, grabbing the back of his neck and pulling him down in order to kiss him more quickly. She felt his cock rub against her and she moaned into his mouth, unable to keep herself from pushing her body up against him. John pulled back for a moment and let himself catch his breath, a hand moving from its place on her side to move himself into position. Kelly moved a hand to his back and she held onto him tightly, bracing herself. John slowly pushed forward, sinking himself into her, being careful not to rush it. Kelly let her head fall back and she moaned, giving him a clear audible cue that there was no pain. John pushed himself all the way in, his mouth moving over her neck and again capturing her lips. Kelly returned the kiss with as much passion as John was giving. John started to move, going almost excruciatingly slow, pulling almost all the way out before pushing back in.

John gradually increased his pace until he'd set a steady rhythm, a tempo that was easy enough for Kelly to follow. Her hips moved to meet his of their own accord, not quite matching his pace. John's mouth moved over her skin and chest, occasionally returning to her

lips for a quick, somewhat sloppy kiss. It was just hard to concentrate on his mouth when he was moving inside her. His hands were running so perfectly down her sides to her thighs, lifting them slightly in an attempt to widen his access. Kelly shifted her legs a bit higher and wrapped them around his waist, trying to pull him closer, moving quicker. John got the hint and his movements started to intensify, though his thrusts became shorter to compensate for the increase in speed. Kelly didn't attempt to muffle her moans, knowing that John loved the sounds and that they provided another level of arousal for him. Kelly expected him to settle into a new rhythm, but rather he moved his hands to the bed as his pace continued to increase. He stopped kissing her skin and set his head against her shoulder, focusing fully on his thrusting. He was trying to keep his movements even, but was failing, to Kelly's enjoyment. It meant each thrust was different, leaving Kelly's body unable to become too accustomed to the sensation.

It wasn't long before John's thrusting was more like an assault rifle than a pistol, leaving Kelly trying to move her hips fast enough to match him with her legs still clinging to him. Her hands had both moved to his shoulders, gripping his skin tightly; as though the force of their bodies coming together might suddenly send him across the room. Her chest arched up, pressing against him harder as her mouth hung open, letting the sounds of her pleasure tumble out. She could feel her climax racing toward her at the furious pace of his thrusting. Still, it hit her like a charging GÅ°ta, and left her gasping for breath between cries of his name. Her body tightened around him, but John's kept moving, now focused on achieving his own release. Kelly lost all ability to form words as he switched to rapid-fire short thrusts with enough force behind them that she was sure if she'd had normal bones they'd be crushed. John shifted his weight to one arm, his other hand moving down between them to settle on Kelly's clitoris. Kelly lifted her head to bury her face in John's hair while she stopped rolling her hips, for fear that any movement would remove his fingers from the sensitive bundle of nerves.

John started to slow occasionally, taking a break between faster thrusts to regain some energy, all the while his fingers still rubbing Kelly. It was during one of his faster bouts of thrusting that Kelly's second climax hit her, expelling the air from her lungs with a loud cry of ecstasy. Kelly hadn't even been aware she could come more than once, but somehow John had managed it. He then returned to his steady, fast pace and Kelly could only hold on tight as he moved, her toes curled and her fingers digging into his back. John finally slowed and pushed himself as far into Kelly as he could go, releasing his warmth inside of her. John collapsed onto her and they just laid there for a moment, trying to catch their breath. There were few things that could tire a Spartan out, but Kelly had never felt tired like this before; particularly after a lovemaking session. It was almost a minute later when John finally pulled himself out and rolled over onto his back. Kelly rolled over enough to drape herself over him, happily resting her head on his chest.

"Did you orgasm twice?" John asked, shifting Kelly a bit higher so her head was on his shoulder. Kelly only nodded, not sure if words were possible yet. John's arms wrapped around her and he kissed the top of her head. "Good."

"I didn't know I could," Kelly said breathlessly, finally managing to

find her voice. She shifted on his chest to be more comfortable, aligning her body with his a bit more. "How did you know?"

"I did some reading," John answered. "A marine gave me a book about 'How to Please a Woman' as either a joke or a prank. I'm not sure which it qualified as."

"Well the joke's on him," Kelly said, smiling with a slight laugh. "Because you certainly pleased your woman; probably more than he ever has any of his." Kelly moved her fingers lightly over John's chest. "Did you learn anything else?"

"I've only read the first chapter, but there are nine more." John's voice was low and Kelly could tell that he was starting to drift off to sleep.

"I can't wait to see what's in the later chapters," Kelly teased, and John laughed lightly before falling silent. "I love you, John," she said softly. Kelly listened to his heartbeat, and from his breathing she knew he was still awake, but he remained quiet. She hadn't really expected John to say the words back to her, but his silence still hurt - as it always did. Kelly closed her eyes and banished that thought from her mind, and settled in to get some rest.

13. Birthday Surprise

****Title: Birthday surprise****

****Pairing: Palmer/Lasky****

****Author's note: I'm also opening this series up to requests for pairings or prompts. I still retain the right to refuse pairings or actions I don't like or feel comfortable with but I would like to know what you want me to write, and what you want to read. ****

Tom collapsed onto the cotton sheets, ignoring the thought that he was soaking the fabric and probably the mattress below. He was too tired and content to really care at the moment, so he let himself lounge on the soft bedding. He looked down to his stomach where the towel had landed before he turned to the other side of the bed. "Don't like the view?" he teased.

"Oh I love the view, that's why the towels on your stomach," Sarah teased back as she sat down on her side of the bed, rubbing another towel against her hair. "The towel is to help you dry off." She spread her towel out and lay down on the bed beside him.

"That way of drying off is boring," Tom rolled onto his side, his hand reaching over to gently touch her stomach right below her naval. "I was thinking we could maybe see if we could heat each other up enough to get dry." Tom was always friskier after shower-sex; and even more so after surprise shower-sex.

Today was Tom's favorite day of the year, and it had been that way since he'd first celebrated it with Sarah. Tom had never really cared about his birthday before, but with Sarah the whole day was dedicated to the two of them doing whatever he wanted. That usually started with wake-up-sex, but because Tom had gotten in the shower right after getting up today, Sarah had surprised him. From there they

usually just spent the day relaxing together; lying on the couch, cuddling, and watching movies until dinner - they'd order something for delivery so Tom didn't have to cook. After their meal they would watch some more of Tom's favorite movies until the urge struck him for physical intimacy. Sarah had an open policy about sex on his birthday; meaning that if he wanted sex, that was what they would do, no matter where or in what way. During his first birthday with Sarah he'd abused that privilege, spending the entire day trying to think of new places and ways he hadn't screwed her yet. It had been fun at the time, but Tom regretted it the next day. He'd felt terribly guilty for treating her like an object. So since then he'd used the privilege fairly conservatively.

Sarah smiled and laughed lightly. "Although that sounds like the most wonderful idea, there was a reason why you got up so early," she reminded him. Tom looked to the clock and groaned as he realized that he only had a quarter of an hour to get dried, dressed, and be at the meeting with Del Rio. "Like I was saying, Commander, the towel is for you to dry off so you won't be late."

Tom groaned again. "But today's my birthday," he complained, letting his hand travel up Sarah's stomach toward her chest.

Sarah reached down and grabbed his hand, lifting it up to press her lips to his palm. "Go to your meeting, I'll be here when you get home," Sarah assured him. "You don't want to upset the Captain by being late, and you're wasting time." Tom sighed and sat up, knowing she would nag him until he got dressed. He didn't really mind the nagging though, she was really just trying to keep him on track. She kept him moving at moments like this when he would rather avoid work.

Tom forced himself to sit up, grabbing the towel as it fell to his lap. He dried himself off, watching Sarah as she moved over to their closet and got out his uniform. Tom stood from the bed and moved around to Sarah's side. She pulled his uniform out and moved over to lay it down on the bed. Tom moved to her and smirked as he set his hand on her ass. Sarah turned to him but she had a look that was usually accompanied by the phrase 'you can't seriously be doing that right now.' Tom moved a bit closer but she was still frowning at him so he removed his hand.

Sarah moved away and Tom grabbed the pants of his uniform, slipping them on. "Free balling?" Sarah asked, grabbing a pair of socks out of the dresser. "Either you're lazy, are trying to cut time for a bit of fun, or prepping for later tonight."

"Maybe a little of each," Tom said, smiling as he zipped his pants. Sarah retrieved socks while Tom put on his shirt and buttoned it up. When Sarah moved over to hand him the socks Tom grabbed her wrist and pulled her closer in one quick motion. He knew that to Sarah it was probably slow, but it was the best he could manage and Sarah let him. He pulled her bare body against his and wrapped his arms around her waist, hands touching the skin above the curve of her backside. "Hopefully this won't take too long."

"It will take as long as it needs to," Sarah said as she draped the socks over his shoulder. "Now don't be late. If you get in trouble, being chewed out by Del Rio will only keep you away even longer."

Tom nodded and reluctantly released her before he sat down to put on his socks. Sarah walked out of their room, grabbing his robe as she did so. Tom smiled, knowing she'd taken his robe on purpose, because he'd always told her he liked it when she wore his clothing. Once Tom had his socks on he moved out of the bedroom to the living room. Sarah was in the kitchen but he noted she'd set his shoes by the couch for him. He couldn't help but smile at the gesture as he moved over to the couch. Tom slipped on his shoes and tied them neatly so they would look presentable. "I'll be home as soon as I can."

"Don't rush things, or you'll seem rude," Sarah scolded as she moved out of the kitchen and toward him. Sarah knew Tom wanted to be a Captain eventually, to have his own ship, and she believed in that dream so she was always reminding him to behave or trying to guide him. Tom didn't really need it, he hadn't gotten to his current position because he'd slacked, but he appreciated her intentions and knew that she really just cared about him. Sarah placed his hat on his head, adjusting it slightly so it sat properly. "But don't take too long, you know how riled up seeing you in your uniform can get me."

"I'll stay only long enough not to be impolite," Tom assured her, pulling her down for a goodbye kiss. He left their apartment. Without Sarah actually beside him, it was a bit easier to focus on his duty for the day. Sadly it did not make the meeting any less frustrating to sit through. There was a lot of arguing; Captains claiming the situation in one system was more important than another, and others arguing the opposite. In the end there wasn't any progress made, but none of it had really involved Infinity, so he didn't care much as long as the meeting was over.

Tom returned home as quickly as he could, hoping to salvage at least some of his birthday. When he entered the apartment he found it empty, much to his annoyance. One of his movies had started playing on the television, something Sarah must have set it up, but she was nowhere to be seen. There was a message on their terminal as well. He hit play and could see Sarah tying her hair back while leaning down so the camera could see her. "I was looking in the fridge and realized we were low on some things, so I'm going to the store. If I'm not back by the time you get home just make yourself comfortable and I'll be back soon. I love you." The video cut off and Tom sighed, feeling defeated. Nothing about today was going the way he wanted, and he seemed to have no way to fight it.

Tom moved to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, noting that they were low on a lot of their usual foods like milk and eggs. He grabbed one of the cans of pineapple juice he liked and left the kitchen. Tom lay down on the couch, deciding that he could at least watch a movie to hopefully improve his mood. He was still disappointed Sarah wasn't there to watch with him, which was a part of his birthday he always liked. Though he did see at least one good side to the situation - as Sarah leaving the apartment meant that she had gotten dressed. Maybe he'd be able to convince her to strip for him, as he'd never had her do that before.

Tom stared at the movie on the screen but he found himself glancing at the door fairly often, looking for Sarah's return. He smiled as he suddenly got a fun idea, or at least one that he thought might be fun. Tom sat up and undid the buttons of his uniform, unbuckled his

pants, before grabbing his cap which he'd tossed on the table. He positioned himself on the couch so that he was lying down as he would if Sarah were with him, his back slightly propped up on the arm of the chair. He let his right leg and arm droop off the side of the couch, tipping his hat a bit so that it wouldn't fall off and opened his shirt to show off his chest. He settled in to watch his movie, trying to remain casual in case Sarah entered when he wasn't paying attention. Tom occasionally sipped at his juice and relaxed, enjoying the thoughts in his head of what might happen when Sarah got home. Unfortunately he got a little too relaxed, and ended up drifting off to sleep.

Tom woke to the smell of something cooking, but he couldn't recall what he'd been making. Tom sat up with a jolt, realizing that he had fallen asleep while cooking. He couldn't believe he'd done that, now the food would burn and he'd have to scramble to salvage it. He stopped as his head cleared and he then realized that he hadn't actually started cooking anything before he fell asleep. So who was? Tom looked to the kitchen where he could see Sarah standing with her back to him, working on the stove. It was such an odd sight that Tom had to take a moment to just watch her, as she hadn't realized he was awake. He looked down and realized that she'd put a blanket over him and it was now gathered in his lap.

Sarah turned and finally spotted him sitting up. "Did you have a good nap?" she asked as she moved the pan off of the stove and then to a cabinet to get out plates.

"You cooked?" Tom asked, his surprise clear in his voice. "And nothing's on fire?"

Sarah glared at him from over her shoulder as she placed plates on the counter. "Hey, just because I prefer your cooking, that doesn't mean I can't cook." She started to fill their plates with the vegetables from the pan. "I'm a soldier, I can follow orders, and that's all a recipe is."

Tom had to agree that she was basically right. But experimenting with a recipe could also make a dish a lot better, not that he was going to argue that point. Sarah moved over to the table and Tom got up from the couch, moving to join her as he buttoned up his shirt and buckled his belt, a bit dejected that his ploy hadn't worked. He was surprised even more when he sat down and saw what Sarah had made. "You made chicken cordon bleu?" He hadn't realized that Sarah even knew what ingredients were in the meal.

"Yeah, you said it was your favorite, so I made it. I know today hasn't been exactly the birthday you wanted, but I thought I could make it a bit better." Sarah took her seat and placed her napkin on her lap. "Why do you think I went to the grocery store?" She grabbed her fork and knife, looking across the table at Tom. "Did I do something wrong?"

Tom shook his head, realizing that he'd been staring. "No, not at all. I'm really touched by you doing this, Sarah." Tom smiled and Sarah returned it. "I was just thinkingâ€¦" Tom chuckled, a bit nervous of how she'd react. "I was thinking about punishing you for leaving the house by making you do a strip tease. But now, I don't think that would be fast enough for me."

Sarah smirked as she cut off another piece of her meat. "Why don't you leave planning tonight's entertainment to me," she suggested, stabbing the bit of chicken and putting it in her mouth. Tom raised an eyebrow, a bit intrigued by what she had planned. Sarah usually left planning out the day to him, but it was a rather tantalizing idea to let her decide. She knew him well and he knew she would probably do everything that he would have wanted anyway, and she might put a fun spin on it.

"I trust you," Tom assured her, returning to his food. It was a wonderful meal and he made a mental note to allow Sarah to cook more often when she wanted to, not just assume that he had to cook all the time. Tom explained what he remembered from the meeting that day, though it was really just idle chatter to fill the silence as they ate. Sarah mentioned a bit of the recent redevelopment that had happened in town that she'd noticed when getting the groceries.

When the meal was finished Tom insisted on taking their dishes to the kitchen and Sarah relented. He rinsed them off and set them in the sink, deciding that they could wait until later to be fully cleaned. It was his birthday after all, and he deserved to be a bit lazy. When Tom moved into the living room Sarah was standing near the television screen, flicking through their video selection. Tom sat down on the couch, putting one leg up so that Sarah could lay down with him when she finished. Sarah finally made her selection and moved over to the couch, lying down so that her head was resting on his stomach.

Tom recognized the opening sequence of the movie; he'd seen the beginning several times, but he'd never actually gotten all the way to the ending without falling asleep or being called away to do something else. About an hour into film there was also a rather explicit sex scene, and Tom had never been able to watch it without getting aroused. He was amused that Sarah had chosen it, knowing full well what it did to him. He wondered if Sarah had set this up on purpose, leaving him even more interested in what she had planned.

They watched the movie as they usually would, all the way until the scene that led up to the sex. The characters were still talking, working their way up to the fun part when Sarah started to touch him. She'd turned onto her side where she could watch the movie but he was sure that wasn't her focus as her hand move up to his thigh, slowly massaging him. He was anticipating the start of the scene, knowing that it would be when she'd really start. He didn't have to wait long as the kissing started on the screen and her hand traveled over his leg, moving higher. As the characters started to tug at clothing and touch skin he felt Sarah turn on his lap and her busy hand moved to his groin, rubbing him through his pants. Her free hand undid two of the lower buttons on his shirt and she pushed the clothing open enough for her to place a kiss on his stomach.

Her hand continued to rub him while the other moved to his waist, deftly undoing his belt. Tom knew now exactly what her plan was, and he had to move quickly before she got too far. His hand moved down to her cheek and he gently pulled up toward his own face. Sarah moved without a fight, raising herself up to let Tom pull her close and press their lips together. The kiss quickly deepened as his hand removed the tie from her hair and his fingers slid into the now loose stands, pulling her closer. His tongue forced its way into her mouth as he took all he could get from her in the moment.

Sarah moved away a little before he was ready, but he let her go. Her lips travelled along his jaw, slowly moving to his neck. She moved her hand from his belt to his chest, unbuttoning his shirt as her mouth continued to move south. Tom watched her as she move lower and lower, his hands brushing her hair out of her face so he could watch her. She made her way down his chest slowly, her hand starting to massage his groin a bit rougher. Tom couldn't help the way his hips pushed up toward her hand.

Sarah unzipped his pants and he was glad that he'd forgone his underwear for the day. Her hands deftly pulled down his pants enough to free him from the restricting clothing. Her fingers wrapped around him and Tom let out a sigh of relief as he felt the pleasure of her touch. Her fingers worked his body with practiced ease that left Tom breathing deeper, letting his head fall back, moaning as her nails scratched lightly at his inner thigh. She was quickly stoking his lust, each touch perfectly placed and with just the right amount of force. Then suddenly her lips touched him, gently like a kiss on the cheek. Tom lifted his head so that he could watch her, always finding the show as exciting as the sensation of her actions. She progressed slowly, just the way that Tom liked it. He wondered for a moment if she went slowly with every man she'd been with, but he squashed it, not wanting to think of Sarah with other men while she was going down on him.

Sarah started to slowly take him into her mouth and Tom gripped the couch, trying to fight his urge to thrust toward the sensation. Sarah knew what she was doing, exactly how quickly to swallow down more of him and when to speed up the bobbing of her head. Tom watched, enthralled by her actions and the sight of his cock disappearing more into her mouth. Tom hated the men who had come before him for making Sarah believe that it was required for her to go down on them for sex, but at the moment he was grateful the years of practice had made her so skilled. She took him all the way in before her head started to move, slow at first but the speed quickly increasing. Sarah's hands moved to his thighs, keeping him pinned to the couch so he stayed put while she worked. Tom sat up enough to be able to reach her, fingers brushing her hair out of the way so his view wasn't obscured. She worked his cock perfectly and it didn't take long before Tom's fingers were threaded through her hair, applying force here or there to keep her down on him longer. It was a shame that Tom had a weak spot for the way she worked her mouth, it always ended too soon for his liking but he couldn't help it.

Tom tugged on her hair, trying to get her to pull away from him before it was too late. "Sarah, stop or I'm going to come." She ignored him, still bobbing her head at a quick steady rhythm. "Sarah!" he said a bit louder, accompanied by another tug of her hair. Her hands only clutched his thighs tighter and he realized she wasn't going to stop. He relented, accepting her choice and trying to relax as she continued. She kept up her pace and Tom became aware that the room was echoing with sounds, ones that he was making. His breathing had become deep, his moans husky and appreciative, and he couldn't seem to keep her name off his lips. He must have made some sign that he was about to climax because Sarah pulled back enough that as he released it went into her mouth and not directly down her throat. She waited until he'd completely finished before she pulled off of him. Tom watched her as she stayed still for a moment, eyes closed, before he saw her throat move as she swallowed. She dipped

down again and her tongue moved over him, cleaning him.

Sarah finally fully sat up and she smiled at him, a looking satisfied with herself. "Did you enjoy yourself?" She moved up and held herself over him, kissing his cheek.

"You never disappoint me," Tom said, turning her head and kissing her quickly. He could taste himself on her lips, but at the moment he couldn't help himself. "Though you know I don't like leaving you without satisfaction. And I know you're not having your time of the month, so I think that things should be fair."

Sarah leaned forward and her lips gently brushed Tom's ear. "The night's still young. I'm sure you'll even the score." Sarah sat up and Tom tried to follow but she pushed him back down. "You should get cleaned up, put those clothes in the hamper, and get in bed. Maybe take another little nap. I'm going to put away the leftovers and rinse out the sink." Sarah stood and moved toward the kitchen.

Tom sighed and decided not to argue. He was too content at the moment to want to fight. He stood and quickly stripped off his shirt. He folded it and then removed his pants, folding them as well. He moved over to the kitchen and placed a kiss on Sarah's shoulder. "Are you going to watch my ass as I walk away?"

"Like you need to ask," Sarah smirked as she shoveled the remaining food into an open container. Tom turned and walked toward the bedroom, glancing back and seeing that Sarah was watching him. He was surprised though when he noticed her eyes roaming over all of him, not just his rear. It left him feeling uplifted as he moved into the bedroom.

Tom hung his uniform up and knew he'd have to get it cleaned properly tomorrow, but it could wait. He grabbed a towel from the hamper and quickly dabbed away the extra sweat from his body before he moved to the bed. Tom lay down on the bed, propping himself up a bit and debating if he should or shouldn't get under the covers. He decided to save time and stay above them, trying to position himself on the bed in a way that would entice Sarah. He propped his back up against the wall and bent his left leg, resting one arm on it, and waited.

After some time Tom had to get a little sleepy, but was suddenly pulled out of it as Sarah shut the bathroom door. He could hear water running for a moment and then nothing. He'd started to drift off in the silence until the bathroom door opened and Tom perked up as he saw Sarah. She leaned against the door frame and smirked at him. "Hello, sailor," she greeted with a wicked smile.

Sarah was wearing her old marine uniform, but she'd replaced the pants she usually insisted on with a skirt, which was clearly too short for her. It reminded Tom of when he'd first really met her years ago. She'd been beautiful that night and she looked just as lovely as she stood in the doorway. The difference was that this time he didn't feel at all ashamed of his licentious thoughts about her. She crossed the space, her hips swaying with each step. "Hello, marine," he said as she neared. "What brings you to my quarters, soldier?"

"I was trying to get some sleep," Sarah started, coming to a stop

beside the bed. "The thing is, my teammates snore like a garage of Warthogs and I can't get any rest at all. And I've heard that officers have bigger beds, certainly with enough room for a tired trooper." Sarah looked over to the space beside him. "Looks like you have some open space, Captain."

"I do have quite a bit of open space," Tom admitted. "But it would be rather inappropriate for me to allow you into my bed."

Sarah moved around the bed and Tom watched her, trying to figure out what she'd do. "I can't go back to the barracks, sir. I'll never get even a second of sleep with all that noise. Please, sir, I'll do anything." She leaned forward and let her hands rest on the mattress. Tom couldn't help his glance down at her chest before he looked back to her face. Sarah sat down on the edge of the bed, still acting hesitant.

Tom reached out and he gently touched her cheek, guiding her to lean toward him. He leaned forward as well and whispered into her ear. "Well I do need to even a score." He leaned back and patted the bed beside him.

Sarah moved fully onto the bed and one of her hands moved to his thigh. "I'm sure that I can help you out." Her hand moved up his thigh but his hand grabbed her wrist before she could touch his manhood. Sarah carefully retracted her hand and Tom reached over to her thigh pulling a bit to get her to come closer. She watched him, puzzled, but moved as he was directing. "If that's not how I can help you then what do you want from me?"

Tom sat up fully so he was sitting on the bed beside her and leaned in close. He whispered, using the most authoritative voice as he could. "I want you to follow my orders." His hand moved from her thigh and settled on her crotch, starting to rub through the material of her underwear. He was momentarily disappointed that she'd actually worn anything under the uniform, but also pleasantly surprised to find that the cloth he was feeling was softer and smoother than anything she usually wore.

Sarah's eyes closed and she took in a deep breath. "Yes sir," she said as she exhaled. She sucked in another breath sharply as his finger slipped under her underwear to touch her sensitive lips. Tom wasn't sure if it had really felt that good or if she was playing it up to stroke his ego. He didn't really care much if her sounds were fake though, her body couldn't lie. As his fingers caressed the space between her legs he could feel she was already slick. His finger easily slid in, just a little, as he was still teasing her at this point. If this was his birthday gift, he was going to properly enjoy it as best he could. Sarah let out a sound of frustration and she turned toward him, placing her face against his shoulder.

Tom decided that he'd teased her enough and made his choice of action. He removed his finger and gripped the hem of her skirt. "You know something seems a bit off." He pulled the skirt up enough so that he could see her underwear. Just as he had expected she was wearing white panties that even had a lacey, flowery trim. "Those don't look like regulation undergarments to me," he observed, turning to look Sarah in the eyes. "Un-button your shirt," he ordered. Sarah unbuttoned her shirt, slowly revealing the matching white bra. Tom waited until she'd fully unbuttoned before he spoke. "Are you sure

you didn't come here to seduce me?" Tom asked.

Sarah raised her head and looked away from him evasively. "Well maybe I didn't just come here to get some sleep," she admitted. "I may have heard a rumor or two about you." Sarah's eyes dropped between his legs for a second before smiling and looking back to his face. "Seems at least some of those rumors are true." Her hand that was closest to him gently touched his thigh, teasing him.

Tom let her hand touch him, his own hand moving to her inner thigh as well and gently rubbing. "What kind of rumors have you heard about me, soldier? I want to hear them all."

Sarah's hand gripped his leg lightly, acting hesitant before answering. "We'llâ€¦I've heard you kiss so sweetly women crave it like chocolate." Tom's hand moved a bit on her thigh, moving higher. "I've heard that you have a talent for finding that spot in a woman that makes her shriek in pleasure." Tom's hand moved to settle on her crotch. Sarah squirmed slightly as she waited for more, but didn't get it. Sarah gripped his thigh a bit tighter before she spoke again. "I've heard you screw so perfectly that women scream your name in God's place."

Tom smiled, amused by the fake rumors she'd come up with and rewarded her by starting to rub her lightly. He nipped at her jaw before pulling back enough to look her in the eye. "Well how about we see how many of those rumors I can verify for you?" He didn't give her a chance to respond before he pulled her to him, lips capturing hers. His tongue slipped into her mouth and she opened up to him without a fight. Her tongue slid over his as she reciprocated the action, the both of them now fighting to explore every bit of the other's mouth. Her free hand slid into his hair, pulling him toward her. Tom leaned his upper body forward and Sarah leaned back until she was lying back on the bed.

Tom pulled away and was pleased as she tried to follow him and kiss him more. "That's one," Sarah said as she let out a long breath. Tom couldn't help but smile, enjoying the sort of vague praise. "Now how about you prove the other two true, unless you think you can't manage it."

Tom smirked, enjoying the challenge; though he wasn't sure if it was what she was actually doing, or if she was still playing her character. He didn't really care, either way he was enjoying himself and it served as an extra turn-on. His finger slid into her, rewarded by a gasp of pleasure as he didn't bother teasing and instead pushed in almost all of the way in. Tom shifted his hand into a familiar position and flexed his finger, feeling around inside of her. He knew he'd hit the spot when she let out a loud cry of delight and her hand gripped his thigh a bit too roughly. "That's two," Tom commented as he leaned to whisper into her ear. "Sarah, your grip's too tight." Sarah released his thigh and grabbed the sheets below them instead. "Now let's see about that third rumor," Tom said as he pulled away and spoke normally. "Think of how this will feel when it's my cock rubbing relentlessly against that spot."

Sarah squirmed as he continued to finger her while his mouth moved over her neck, moving further down. He reached her sternum before he pulled away just long enough to pull her bra down and partially expose her breasts. He nipped at the exposed skin before sucking one

of her nipples into his mouth. Sarah's arms moved around his head and held him against her, one hand threading fingers into his hair. She bucked against his hand and Tom had to struggle to keep his hand in position while trying to be sure each breast got equal attention. "Tom," hearing his name got his attention and he raised his head from her chest so he could look at her. Sarah leaned her head against his shoulder as she spoke. "Please, I need it. If you get in now you can still even the score."

Tom eased up just a bit on his motions while he responded. "Or I could finger you to completion, and when you've come then I can switch to my dick," Tom countered. Sarah groaned and pulled herself a bit tighter to him and he could just barely hear her mutter "please" against his shoulder. "Or you could get on top," he offered, knowing that it was a long shot as her own fears of accidentally hurting him usually got in the way.

Sarah hesitated for a moment before she replied. "If you're sure." It wasn't what Tom had expected, but he was far from unhappy.

Tom slid his fingers out of her and shifted so he was sitting on the bed. "Ride me, soldier," he commanded. He was surprised as she didn't hesitate before straddling him and grabbing his cock gently. She set her knees on the bed, lifted herself up, shifted him into position, and slowly lowered herself onto him. Tom's tucked her skirt up so it wasn't in the way before his hands moved to her waist, giving her a bit of guidance as she started to move up and down. Tom had never had a kink for Sarah being on top, but at that moment he wondered if that had changed. Just the sight of her sitting on him and the feeling of being in her aroused him more than he remembered. Sarah let out a long breath as she settled all the way on him but to his annoyance she stopped moving. "Sarah, keep moving or we won't end even," he reminded her.

"I don't care about even," Sarah moaned, leaning forward so her head was resting against his. "I just needed that cock in me."

Tom frowned, not particularly happy that she wasn't continuing when he wanted her to be pleased too. He gripped her waist tight enough to dig his fingers into her skin. "I ordered you to ride, soldier, not sit on my cock. Now ride," he said, the last two words punctuated by digging his nails just a little into her skin.

Sarah gasped, though he was sure it was more from surprise than actual pain. She slowly started to lift herself up as she let out a strained, "Yes sir." Tom relaxed his grip on her, having gotten his instruction across. She did start to move a bit faster, and Tom tried to urge her on by pulling or pushing on her waist, but she wouldn't be forced to go faster than she was ready for.

Still, at the speed she was going they'd end up climaxing at the same time, and Tom was still determined to even the score. "Stop," he commanded and Sarah obeyed. He set a hand on her stomach and directed her posture a bit. "Hold that position," he instructed before he shifted his own hips and legs. Tom began thrusting up into her from below, and with the first motion he was rewarded with a gasp from his lover. He gripped her hips and increased his pace, filling the room with a chorus of moans and gasps from Sarah as he thrust into her. "Better than you imagined?" Tom said in a slightly strained voice as he drove himself into her, being sure to keep her angle correct to

hit her sweet spot. Sarah's arms wrapped around his head and he could feel her hands weakly trying to grip him but not actually harm him. Luckily Tom didn't have to keep up the strenuous action too long before Sarah's nails dug into his shoulder, her body contracted around him, and she moaned out his name loudly.

Tom stopped and pulled her waist down, indicating that she had the control again. Sarah moved slowly, riding him through her climax until she finally settled on him, breathing deeply. Tom knew it wasn't from actually being tired, it was only her body's reaction to the orgasm and she needed a moment. "That's three," she managed to get out, shifting to set her forehead against Tom's shoulder.

Tom turned and kissed her cheek, letting his hands move higher up her body. "Glad I could sort that out for you," he said as he slid his hands under her shirt. "You want to take this off?" Sarah didn't say anything, just released him and slipped the shirt off. Tom reached behind her and unhooked her bra. Without instruction Sarah removed her bra as well and tossed it to the side. "You should take the skirt off too." Sarah grumbled and Tom sighed. "Take the skirt off," Tom ordered.

"I don't want to get off," Sarah complained, returning her arms to their place around him.

"You won't be off for long," Tom assured her with a pull on her waist. Sarah reluctantly lifted herself off of him and moved off the bed to slip her skirt off. Tom couldn't help himself and he leaned over to grab her ass and tug her a bit toward the bed. Sarah climbed back onto the mattress but Tom stopped her before she returned to her former position. "Are you comfortable with it?" Sarah paused for a moment and then nodded, again moving to return to her position but Tom stopped her again. "Turn around," he instructed.

"We haven't done that in years," Sarah said, seeming hesitant.

"Sure, but it will only be longer if we don't do it now. I trust you," Tom assured her. Sarah took a deep breath to calm herself, but she moved to face away from him and again straddled him. Tom sat up and wrapped his arms around her as she shifted herself into position. She gently took him in her hand, guiding him into position before she lowered herself onto him. Tom held her closer and moaned against her back. She started out moving slowly and Tom had to release his grasp enough that she'd be able to move easier. Her pace started to increase and Tom kissed and bit at her back, trying not to focus on her spine lest she think he was focusing on her tattoo. He started to partially thrust up toward her as she moved, but from his current position he couldn't get proper leverage. Tom reluctantly had to release her, leaning backward to brace his back on the bed while his hands moved to her hips, allowing him to properly thrust upward. Sarah had always been skilled when put in the dominant position during sex; and she seemed to slide easily back into that position, lost in the pleasure and lust as she rose and fell. There were a few moments of pain, but they were swallowed up in the pleasure as they charged furiously to their climax.

Tom tried to keep things even, but he ended up releasing into Sarah while she was still riding him at full speed. Tom stopped his thrusting, leaving it completely to Sarah, so he could sit up and

move his hands around to her clit and try to assist her own completion. It took a couple more seconds before Sarah finally found her release and started to slow. Tom wrapped his arms around her and buried his face against her back until she'd stopped moving. They sat quietly for a moment before Sarah broke the silence. "Happy Birthday, Tom."

Tom hugged her tighter and kissed her back. "I love you, Sarah." He released her and pushed her forward slightly. "I want to cuddle."

Sarah slowly lifted herself up and rolled over to the side until Tom leaned back and lay down on his chest. "Did you enjoy yourself? Any pain?"

Tom had expected the question, Sarah having always been worried whenever she was in control. "A little, but I don't think it will be a problem. It was just a few moments of pain during, but I don't feel anything now." Sarah scooted a bit closer and he knew she felt bad about it. For how violent she could be in combat, she hated causing him pain - particularly during sex. "I think from now on I'm going to have you plan my birthdays. That was by far the best one yet." Sarah laughed and Tom smiled, glad that she wasn't dwelling on her fear. "You know me so well. I never even told you I liked your marine uniform."

"Well, I could guess from how all over my ass you were back when you still stupidly thought of me as jail baitâ€|even though I wasn't," Sarah reminded him.

"You were half my age. I didn't want to take home a woman who was half my age for a one night stand." Tom moved his hand to run his fingers through their hair. "Not that I really wanted you to be a one night stand, of course."

"Oh?" Sarah said, lifting her head. "What exactly does that mean?"

"It means I was going to pull out all the stops; give you the most amazing session of lovemaking you would have ever experienced. So great, you'd never want to leave my bed and I'd be able to, over time, convince you to be my girlfriend," Tom explained.

"Well, fuck," Sarah cursed. "We wasted a lot of time you could have been fucking me senseless, because if you'd given me a good night on day-one, I'd expect just as much from that day on."

"That may have been a bit much with what I had planned, though I could guarantee I would have given you more than the guys you were bringing home. You deserve better than what they were giving you." Tom kissed the top of her head and hugged her tightly. "So how long have you been planning all of this?"

"I was actually planning it for our anniversary. But you seemed upset about you not getting freedom on your birthday, so I thought I shouldn't wait. Now I have to come up with something else to do."

"Or you could leave it up to me," Tom suggested. "You did this for me, so I should get to do something for you."

"Or you could do something for me for my birthday, and we can just enjoy our anniversary like normal," Sarah countered.

"All right, deal. I promise I'll make sure your birthday is extra special this year," Tom promised. "But I still get to be romantic on our anniversary."

"Deal," Sarah agreed, lifting herself up to kiss him quickly before she settled back in. Tom lay awake for a while, just holding his lover and enjoying the moment of peace and contentment.

14. Quiet Me

****Title: Quiet Me****

****Pairing: Kathleen/Fred****

Kathleen paced back and forth across the room, having done so for the last twenty minutes. For the most part her words were lost to Fred. He'd heard all her complaints about ONI before and nothing had changed - only what had triggered her rant this time was different. She'd made a request to work security on an upcoming peace summit with the Sangheili, but had been turned down. She hadn't been given a reason for being declined, so her mind had gone to work, instantly blaming some shady purpose of ONI. Fred wasn't sure how much of what she said was simply due to paranoia and how much was actually based on actions of the intelligence agency, but for Kathleen they were the shadow behind everything bad that happened these days. He was starting to worry about it, but whenever he asked her about why she didn't trust them she clammed up and wouldn't tell him anything, just insist he let it go.

"There is no logical reason for them to deny my request," Kathleen asserted as she made another pass of the room. Fred wasn't paying attention at all at this point; and occupied himself with watching her ass as she walked away and her chest as she walked back. She didn't notice, still caught up in her tirade. She stopped and Fred looked up to see that she'd finally noticed his inattention and was now glaring at him. "Would you take this seriously?" she snapped.

Fred sighed and sat up from where he was laying on the bed. "You know when you had pulled me aside into empty quarters with a good sized bed, I had expected maybe some cuddling or making out...not you ranting about ONI," Fred admitted. "Excuse me if I'm less thrilled with your actual intentions." Fred was annoyed that she'd gotten his hopes up, and instead wanted to fume about how she couldn't see that damned Sangheili friend of hers.

"Fred, this is not something to joke about," Kathleen scolded, crossing her arms. "This is troubling, illogical, and it indicates a pattern."

"I'm not joking," Fred corrected her. "I really thought you wanted to cuddle or something." Fred sat up on the bed and rubbed at his temple in frustration. "It's a pattern only you see."

Kathleen let out a long breath. "I wish Blade was here, he

understands," she said as she returned to pacing. "The war should be long over, but we're still fighting; even though we're supposedly trying to make peace."

This was the part of her argument that Fred admitted had some traction. In the years since the war ended, the fighting just never seemed to stop. Sure it wasn't the struggle for survival it used to be, but UNSC forces were still fending off splinter Covenant groups. It felt like no progress had been made and it was worrisome. Kathleen was silent for a little while, and Fred knew that she was going through her own thoughts that she refused to share with him. He was sure if she would just tell him more about what was bothering her he might actually understand, but she was a brick wall.

"Why wouldn't they want the ODSS, the human troops the Arbiter trusts the most, to be on security? Why are we _never _security for things like this? It's not like they've given us something important to do in the meantime," Kathleen continued to grouse.

Fred knew that she would go on for hours and hours if he let her, not that he'd found a way to stop her yet. He did wish she'd stop bringing up the half-faced Sangheili though. He hated hearing about Blade, and it only made him more annoyed. "Come lay down with me," he suggested, earning himself a glare from Kathleen. Fred sighed as she turned back to her pacing and grumbling to herself. Fred tugged absently at his shirt, the room was feeling a bit stuffy. He decided that if he was going to be stuck here until she finished he might as well be comfortable, and pulled his shirt off. He decided to remove his undershirt as well for good measure. He looked over to Kathleen and found that she'd stopped again. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"What are you doing?" Kathleen questioned in return.

"I'm getting comfortable," Fred answered, as though it was obvious. "It's hot in here, so I took my shirt off." Kathleen just stared at him for a moment before she started pacing again. Fred was curious about her reaction just now - what he'd done had distracted her enough to get her to halt her ranting. Fred stood from the bed and moved to stand in the path of her pacing, deciding to try something new.

Kathleen stopped and stared at his chest for a second before she looked up to his face. "What now?"

"I know you need to vent this kind of thing Kathleen, but is this really accomplishing anything? I follow what you're saying up to the point where you refuse to give me the actual details, which seem to be the root of this paranoia about ONI. But since I don't have that root, I don't get where all this comes from or why you jump to these conclusions. It just sounds like you're being resentful simply for being denied your requests. I justâ€¦I wish you would tell me so this would make sense and I could understand." Fred reached out and touched her waist but she pushed his hand away. "Why won't you tell me?"

"For your own safety," Kathleen answered, already annoyed by the subject. "Why should I need to tell you everything? Can't you trust me?"

"I love you, Kathleen, but you're asking me to trust a group that's been our enemies for decades and fear a group that's always been our allies." Fred didn't think it was that illogical for him to have doubts, even if it was Kathleen that was telling him all this. "It's simply asking a lot."

"Blade is not an enemy. But the rebels are, just as they are also part of humanity. I can't believe that you'd let your jealousy cause you not to trust him. If it weren't for Blade, I'd be dead," Kathleen defended.

"It's also because of a Sangheili that you nearly died on your last mission, and didn't Blade try to kill you at one point as well?" Fred countered.

"That Sangheili was an enemy, not a friend, and Blade had been an enemy back when we fought as well. But he's not anymore, so you should let it go." Kathleen took a step toward him in a threatening manner but Fred doubted she'd actually attack him over this. Or so he hoped, at least. "How can we move forward if we can't forget the past?"

Fred didn't argue against her, just stared at the woman before him. It always surprised him how much she'd changed over the years. His second-in-command, who'd often held grudges against opponents for weeks on end during training, had become a voice for letting go of hatred for the Covenant.

Fred decided to let the Covenant side of the issue drop; she wasn't going to change her view on it anytime soon. Blade had his claws in too deep, and he knew Kathleen was fiercely loyal - it was a part of her that he loved. Instead he chose to focus on the human side of the issue. "You're still asking me to blindly vilify a human organization that has only ever helped me and made things better."

"Do you really think they've made anything better? That they did any of it to help you? The only thing ONI cares about is power and advancing human dominance. How can you not see that?" Kathleen asked.

"Because I have no cause to believe any of that. They gave us our training, our augmentations, and our armor. How have they not helped us?"

"Not everyone wanted to be augmented," Kathleen snapped. Fred was surprised by that information, having never considered that a Spartan wouldn't have wanted the augmentations. She had always been an outlier among the Spartan-IIs though, so if anyone was going to have issue with the augmentations it would be her. Still he really couldn't understand why someone would regret having super strength, sight, and hearing. "What?" Kathleen asked.

"I didn't know you were unhappy with the augmentations," Fred answered truthfully. "I guess I always figured you'd like it, and the armor; having the ability to flip a tank, bend metal with ease, and all the other perks."

"This has nothing to do with me, Fred. How can you not get that?" Kathleen rolled her eyes and turned to walk away from him. Fred was irked by her dismissal of him, and in a knee-jerk reaction decided to

stop her. He reached out, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulled her back against his chest. "Fred, let go," Kathleen demanded.

"No," Fred responded, holding her tighter. "Kathleen, I can't just blindly distrust a group that gave me everything I've ever needed, and made me the man I am today. Not without a good reason." Kathleen's elbow then collided with his side and Fred released her. "What was that for?" he asked, rubbing at where she'd struck him.

Kathleen moved to stand before him, her face serious as she leaned closer. "ONI didn't make you who you are, you did that. And don't you ever try to give them credit for that ever again. They don't deserve to claim responsibility for making you the man you are." Fred didn't understand what she meant at first, trying to figure out exactly how she was insulting him. Oddly enough he couldn't find the slight though, and if he didn't know any better he'd think she was actually praising him. "ONI made your armor, and augmented you, but they didn't make you who you are. They gave John all the same things, but you aren't him. They gave you and I the same training, but we aren't the same person. Who you are, what you've made of yourself, is one hundred percent you." Kathleen paused for a moment before she added one last thought. "Who you are as a person is the one thing ONI can't change; they can't take that away from you and replace with something else through science."

Fred furrowed his brow, still not sure what to make of her words. There was something about the way she'd said them that he'd never heard before, a sort of unbending authority to them that he envied. She was standing before him, back rigid, and speaking to him like he was under her command. He wondered if this was the stance, the tone she took up when talking to her troops. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but what exactly is the insult?" he finally asked. "Are you saying that me being weak is my own fault? Or saying that my inability to lead is my fault?"

"By the rings, you're stupid," Kathleen groaned, rolling her eyes. "What part of what I said was an insult?" She took a deep breath before continuing. "You're getting off point. The fact is that the augmentations, the armor, even the SPARTAN program as a whole wasn't for you. It wasn't to help you, it was all for ONI. They don't care about you as anything other than a successful result of the project. You think they batted an eye at all the Spartans who died from the augmentations? Do you really think they care that Sheila, Joshua, or Will are dead? Because they don't. They only care that the Spartans are seen as a success, because it reflects positively on them and it gives them more authority. Suddenly they aren't just the responsible for making new tech, they're also the ones that responsible for producing the saviors of humanity." There was a tint of disgust to Kathleen's voice. "Are you so blind that you really think they give a shit what happens to you? All you are to them is a Spartan, that's it. You're propaganda that's used to dupe more people to join the Spartan-IV program."

"I thought you approved of the Spartan-IVs." Fred could have sworn she'd spoken highly of the five initial recruits to the new program, but now she seemed to be bad mouthing them.

"I like the ones they have now, but it isn't going to stay that way."

Come on, Fred, you have to be able to look ahead." Kathleen frowned at him, seeming genuinely disappointed. "The current five were chosen by Musa, who understands that they had to have long-standing and impressive records. But once word gets out, do you really think he's going to keep control over the selection progress? Hell no. Someone of a higher rank will fill it with his men to make a name for himself; or Parangosky will take full command, someone that has no real understanding of what it takes for a soldier to succeed in actual combat. Soon the program will be full of three kinds of people. The first kind being pilots and medics, the group that jump at the idea of being a Spartan but are shitty in a real fight. They'll just want the title of 'Spartan', without understanding the legacy that comes with it. Then will come the soldiers who managed one act of competence in a battle, and suddenly they're accepted. The rest of their career will be unimpressive, but they'll be let in all the same. They're the people who aren't at all qualified or capable of handling the responsibility, they're just not worthy of the title. Then there's the worst kind, the ones that will ruin the project. The politically chosen. Those that had strings pulled to get accepted and haven't done anything to deserve it. They're spoiled brats who see 'Spartan' as a title to use as a pick-up line at a bar. They're also the most likely to be advanced to leading other Spartans; but rather than seeing it as a solemn duty, they'll just treat it as something to flaunt while at a dinner party." This subject seemed to really annoy Kathleen in a way Fred hadn't really seen before.

Fred looked her up and down and realized that her entire posture had changed. Her body was unusually tense, her shoulders pulled back, and her features serious. She was angry, that much was clear; but it wasn't the same type of unfocused-angry he was familiar with. He knew she would go on for even longer now that he'd branched out on the subjects for her to rant about. He knew that he'd have to do something to end this, but he couldn't really explain why he took the action he did. His hand moved to her neck and held her in place as he moved in close and kissed her. He pulled away and braced for any retaliation.

"Why'd you do that?" Kathleen asked, brow furrowed. "If you're trying to get me to shut up, it's not going to work."

"I wasn't trying to quiet you, Angel," Fred assured her. "I was just looking at you and you are just so—so sexy. I couldn't help myself." He kissed her again and placed his hands on her waist. "You've become such an amazing woman and I just have no self-control. You're just—you've grown so much from when we were trainees."

"Well I did get a bit taller," Kathleen admitted. "But you never used to think I was sexy enough to kiss randomly. If I remember correctly, you used to fear me."

"I was never afraid of you, just wary of angering you unnecessarily." Fred pulled her closer to him until their bodies touched. "You've done more than get taller. You've grown more curves, you've become more graceful, and you've matured. The young, violent girl I knew has become a woman who is perfect."

"There's nothing perfect about me," Kathleen countered.

Fred quickly kissed her again before she could argue further. "Now I'm trying to make you shut up," he said before pressing his lips back to hers to cut off any rebuttal she might have come up with. "When we were kids you clung to grudges like a security blanket. But here you are, defending the Sangheili." Again he had to cut her off with a kiss to keep her from fighting his words. "You used to only care about the next part of the mission, but now you're arguing about things that may not happen until decades in the future. Not to mention I think you complemented me for the first time ever."

"I've complemented you before," Kathleen disputed. "You just don't listen properly. You must be soft in the head, that's why you think I'm perfect. Nothing and no one is perfect."

"But that's exactly what makes you perfect," Fred replied. "You may not be perfect in the literal sense, but you are the perfect you," he tried to explain. "Everyone has flaws, but it's the flaws and the good parts that make us human. You're violent, suspicious, and reckless - but that's perfect for who you are. You wouldn't be a good ODS if you weren't all those things. Even if it means that sometimes you insult me, and that I feel like I'm fighting an alien for your love, I wouldn't change a thing about you."

"You are so soft," Kathleen commented as she rolled her eyes. "Soft in the head, soft of the heart, and with a soft body to boot."

"I'm not as soft as I used to be. Now I'm rock hard," Fred argued, pulling her tighter to him. To his confusion Kathleen started laughing, but he was sure he hadn't said anything funny. She continued to laugh and the fact that he didn't understand was really starting to annoy him. "Stop laughing," Fred demanded, but she just continued. "What's so funny?" Again she ignored him, her amusement only becoming more confusing. He decided to retaliate and wrapped his arms tight around her waist and lifted her up. To his disappointment this seemed to only make her laugh more. Fred carried her over to the bed and pinned her down against the mattress. His mouth moved to her neck and he kissed at her throat, able to feel the vibrations of her voice.

"Fred, what are you doing?" Kathleen asked, her laughter subsiding.

"You won't stop laughing, so I'm just going to have to make you make other noises," Fred explained, settling into place above her. His teeth lightly grazed her skin, teasing just a little bit.

"I was laughing because you made a joke you didn't understand," Kathleen explained, her laughter having turned to a chuckle under his attention. "You're so innocent."

"I'm not innocent," Fred refuted, grinding his hips against hers. This again seemed to make her laugh. "What? What is it that's so funny?" he asked as he pulled away and frowned at her.

"Rock hard," Kathleen answered, as though that made it all clear. Fred still didn't understand what the joke was and she seemed to realize this. He wasn't expecting the hand that slid between them and cupped his groin. "You aren't rock hard, you're soft and flaccid," she explained. She smirked as she started to massage him slowly. "Although I could change that."

Fred moaned as she stroked him through the cloth, burying his face against her shoulder. "Don't tease," he managed between deep breaths.

"I don't tease without intent," Kathleen whispered as she let one of her hands move up his back. "You're the one that isn't man enough to let it be more than teasing."

Usually Fred would ignore the insult, disregard the challenge. But for some reason he decided to rise to the bait. "Not man enough, am I?" he said as he pushed his hips toward her hand and his mouth moved to hers. Fred had expected it would take a lot of buildup to get things moving between them - but with her mouth against his and her hand rubbing against him, the effect was instantaneous. Fred reached down and grabbed her wrist, pulling her hand away. Before Kathleen could complain Fred pushed his groin against hers, his mouth moving to her jaw.

Kathleen clung to him, her hips rising to meet his with each motion. "Now you're the one that better not be teasing," Kathleen said, her hands moving to his back and digging in just a little bit.

Fred bit back the moan of pleasure brought on by the slight pain. In response he moved his hands to her shirt and pulled up. Kathleen sat up enough so he could pull it off. As soon as her flesh was exposed and the clothing flung to the side, Fred's hand moved to the unexplored area. His fingers eagerly mapped out her skin, finding and tracing scars while his mouth moved along her neck. Kathleen squirmed toward his hands wherever they roamed, her fingers scratching at his scalp just a little and her hips pushing up toward him. He decided to be a little brave and pushed the fabric of her bra aside to explore her chest.

Kathleen pulled the garment the rest of the way off and forced Fred to lift his face away from her neck. It did give him the opportunity to dip down and turn more of his attention to her breasts. It had been decades since they'd had this level of intimate contact, so he was savoring every kiss and every touch while he could. Although Kathleen had stated before now that she was open to sex, she hadn't shown that she would be allowing things to progress any further. It was a big step forward, and they were trying to ease into things after all. He slowed the movement of his hips, focusing more on his hands and mouth at the moment.

Kathleen's nails clawed a little harder at his scalp as he latched onto her chest while her other hand scratched down his back. Her back arched up toward him, urging him to apply more force, and Fred obliged. He was so focused on her breasts that he didn't notice when her hand moved from his back to his belt. Fred felt her tug at his waistband but ignored it. He was caught off guard as she slipped her hand into his undergarments, and for the first time in thirty years, her fingers touched his cock. Fred pulled away from her and looked down to the hand that was tucked in his pants. The action was relatively small, yet the meaning behind it was anything but. Because of his position touching was all she could do, but from the way her fingers were gently shifting over the sensitive flesh it was clear she was looking for more.

Fred paused for a moment before he let his hands move to her belt and

he unbuckled it. Kathleen sat up slightly, which allowed her to reach him better and wrap her fingers fully around him, eliciting a sharp intake of breath from Fred. In his own form of retaliation, Fred slipped his hand down the front of Kathleen's pants as well and rubbed against her opening to tease her back. Kathleen let out a sound between a moan and a sigh of relief - like a burn victim that was finally allowed to pour water on a searing wound. Fred had always figured it would take a lot of time before he and Kathleen would be ready for sex, or at least for it to feel right. But with that one little touch, and that moan, the ball had started rolling and it would only gain speed.

Kathleen's hips pushed up toward Fred's hand and she started to stroke him. "Looks like someone finally grew some balls," Kathleen teased, her hand releasing him and sliding down to cup his testicles. "But it takes more than a couple nuts to make a man."

Fred knew she was challenging him again, and once again he decided to go along with her. He was also surprised at how much force he found himself willing to use, feeling powerful with Kathleen pinned under him. He set his free hand against her shoulder and pushed her down on the mattress, which forced her to release him as he became out of reach. Fred shifted away a little more to be sure she couldn't touch him, and he slipped just the tip of his finger down until he found her opening. "I'll show you who's a man," he said in a low voice before he pushed his finger into her. Kathleen moaned and her hips moved to force him deeper in.

Fred moved his finger just a little, watching the way her hands gripped the sheets and her breathing became heavier. He tried to move his hand more, but her pants and his position made it impossible. He slipped his hand away from her and Kathleen raised her head to glare down at him. "Why are you stopping?" Fred didn't answer with words but rather grabbed the waist of her pants and tugged them down. Kathleen's protests stopped and she tried to shift herself so it would be easier for him to remove the clothing.

Fred pulled her pants all the way off before he removed his own pants and underwear. Kathleen sat and Fred climbed onto the bed enough to push her back down. "Stay," he instructed.

"Like hell," Kathleen countered, sitting up again. Fred decided not to pick a fight over it, letting her have her share of the power in their activity. Instead he turned to pulling her underwear down. He pulled them down her legs, placing kisses along her skin as he did so. And once he had them off he kissed his way back up, switching legs every so often.

Fred kissed her left and right hip before he stopped and moved down a bit lower. He kissed the space between her legs, earning a short intake of breath from Kathleen. Fred looked up to her and she was watching him, waiting to see what he'd do next. He kissed the spot again but he moved his lips against the sensitive flesh, this time rewarded with a moan from the marine. She was clearly enjoying it, so he decided to continue; letting his kisses become deeper each time, letting it progress as it would if he were kissing her mouth. His tongue slipped out and he was met with a taste he'd never encountered before, and he liked it. Kathleen's hand ran through his hair, her nails lightly scratching his scalp to indicate she approved. Fred didn't need to be told twice, he was enticed by the taste and wanted

more.

Fred ran his tongue over the area, getting a full taste of her while her fingers twisted into his hair and her second hand joined the first. He threw himself fully into exploring this new activity, finding out what made her nails dig in and what made her thrust her hips toward him. He was wrapped up in his actions, his face buried between her legs, and just listening to her chorus of moans. He couldn't get enough of the taste, lapping it up hungrily until Kathleen pulled on his hair too roughly. "Ow," he complained, lifting away from her sex.

"Cock, now," Kathleen demanded, tugging again. "_Now_," she repeated, but more forcefully.

Fred climbed up and let Kathleen pull him down for a deep kiss, aligning his body with hers. Fred moaned into the kiss as she wrapped her hand around him gently and guided him into position. Once he was in place her hand moved back to his ass and pulled him toward her. Kathleen moaned as Fred thrust forward, savoring each sensation as he sunk deep into his lover. Once he was fully inside her he paused, letting her move into a more comfortable position. "I forgot how glorious you feel," he said, kissing her deeply again while he shifted his hands on the bed to make sure he'd have solid leverage.

Kathleen kissed along his throat until she reached his ear. "Fuck me, Fred, and don't you dare hold back." She kissed him again, her hands gripping his ass tightly for a moment before they moved to his back. Fred started to move, slowly at first, getting a feel for what range of motion he'd have for his thrusts. Kathleen was patient, for a time, until she got tired of his slow pace and she started to thrust up toward him to bring them together more quickly. Not wanting to be outdone, Fred sped up; his mouth hungrily kissing her in small spurts between heavy breaths. He increased his pace bit by bit, and then switched to shorter thrusts so he could use more force. Kathleen stopped trying to keep up, and just let him take control while her nails scratched at his back, urging him to go faster. Lost in his own pleasure, Fred was surprised when his climax suddenly hit him and he spilled himself into her. She wasn't too far behind him, her body gripping him tightly as she came.

Once their motions slowed to a stop, Fred pulled out of her and let himself settle beside her as he caught his breath. "Thatâ€|that wasâ€|" He struggled to find a word that seemed to fit how wonderful that had felt.

"Where did you learn that thing? The things you did with your mouth." Kathleen rolled over and set her forehead against his chest.

"I just enjoyed it," Fred admitted truthfully, draping an arm over her. "I just wanted to kiss that area, you seemed to like it, and when I got a taste I couldn't stop." His hand moved along her spine absently. "You've got an addictive taste."

"Well I'd disagree about that, but if you like it enough to do that again I'm not going to complain." Kathleen wrapped an arm around him and pulled herself closer to his chest. "Worth the wait."

Fred slipped an arm under her, hugged her close, and rolled onto his

back so that she was on top of him. "That's the nicest thing you've ever said." Kathleen lay limp on him, cheek resting on his chest. "I'm so glad I have you back again."

Kathleen just lay on his chest, eyes closed and listening to the rhythm of his breathing. "Can you really not just trust me blindly about ONI?" she asked out of the blue.

Fred sighed, annoyed that she'd brought it back up again. "Kathleen, can't you let that go? We don't really have an option; we have to work with them." He didn't understand why she wouldn't just drop the subject.

"Can you at least promise me you'll be cautious with them and the orders they give you, then?" Kathleen wrapped her arms around him and hugged him. "I don't want to lose you because they screw up."

Fred hugged her tighter to his chest and sighed. "I promise to be careful," he assured her, hoping to put her fears at ease. He couldn't really be mad at her for worrying about him; in the end he was glad she thought him worthy of that level of concern. "I'll still have to work with them, but I'll keep a healthy suspicion."

"Fine," Kathleen reluctantly accepted, for once choosing not to fight him. "Sorry I scratched your back up so much," she added.

Fred had to admit he felt a slight sting as his back rested against the sheets of the bed. However it was hardly enough to cause him any genuine discomfort. "It's alright," he assured her. "I liked it."

"I thought so," Kathleen said, cuddling up a bit more to his chest. "Don't know where your fetish for pain came from though."

"Really?" Fred asked with genuine surprise. "I love a woman who's favorite past time is beating up her best friend. Where ever did I get this connection between pain and pleasure?" He smiled and chuckled slightly, his hand starting to trail along her spine.

"I don't know. Maybe it was always there, and once you got a taste the hunger just rose up." Kathleen ran her hand over his chest, letting herself sink into his warmth. Fred let the conversation drop off, the room falling silent except for the light sound of the two soldiers' breathing.

15. Gift part 2

****Title: Gift Part 2****

****Pairing: Palmer/Lasky****

****Note: So you'll notice that this is Part 2 and you might be wondering where part 1 is. Part 1 is in my other series, Spartan Love and is the lead up to the events that take place in this story so I suggest reading it first. It had to be cut into two parts not only because it was so long but because I wanted the first part to reach a wider audience but didn't want to have to play it safe just because the more realistic route takes it to M rated territory. So go read part 1 and come back so you aren't completely confused. ****

Sarah made her way up to her room, suddenly at a loss for what to do with the rest of her evening. Should she go check out some French night life, walk the streets and enjoy the city? Or should she stay in, curl up under the covers, and get some peaceful sleep? After entering the suite she made her way to the bedroom and lay down on the sheets, not even bothering to undress. The linens felt incredibly soft and the idea of wrapping herself in them and going to bed was indeed tempting. However, just laying around right away seemed like a waste of Tom's gift.

The thought of Tom caused Sarah to look to the empty space next to her - where he would have laid if they were on his bed on Infinity. She still wished that he'd stayed around, but understood he had other plans. It was then that she got an idea, and quickly grabbed her personal tablet and untied her hair. She held out her compad and adjusted it for the best framing before she took a picture, being sure to include the space beside her. She put it in a message and added _'Wish you were here.'_ in text before sending it off to Tom. She wished she could see his face when he received the picture, if only to see the blush she knew he would have.

It took about a minute before Tom messaged her back with _'Looks comfortable, but shouldn't you be dissolving in a bath right now?'_.
—

Sarah considered the suggestion, and concurred that was definitely a good idea. At least by trying the tub out now she'd know for sure if it was big enough for her. She stood from the bed, slipped off her shoes, and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the floor before removing her undergarments. She also grabbed her compad and snapped a photo of her discarded clothing. She sent the picture to Tom, attaching the words _'Yes, sir.'_ to it.

Sarah made her way to the bathroom, setting her compad on the counter and started to run the water. She looked over the selection of bath oils that were arranged in decorative bottles beside the tub, seeing what scents she had to choose from. She picked through them until the tub had filled to her satisfaction. Finally deciding on one with a strawberry scent, she poured some oil in the waiting water. Sarah then took her tablet in hand again and set it within reach on the floor beside the tub before sinking herself into the warm liquid, and let out a long sigh. She'd forgotten how good a bath really felt and how much she missed them. Her eyes closed and focused on how the water soothed the stress in her muscles.

She glanced toward the floor, checking to see if Tom had responded back, and was slightly disappointed to see that he hadn't replied. She was trying not to dwell on him, but for the last year anything close to relaxing that she'd done had included him. And for some reason she couldn't just let it go now. She picked up the device, making a promise to herself that this was going to be the last message she'd send him. She turned the camera on herself and tried to frame the picture so it wouldn't be too revealing. She wanted to tease him, but not embarrass him if he was in public. She mulled over what to say for a few minutes before finally settling on something that was suggestive but not too blunt. _'I'm naked and smelling of strawberries, and you aren't here to enjoy it.'_ she typed before sending the message and image to Tom.

Sarah set her compad back down, reasoning that if that didn't get

Tom's attention then nothing would. She let her head rest on the edge of the tub and focused on just letting herself relax. Things were going well for a few minutes, until the buzz of her phone actually startled her. She looked down at the screen, trying not to be excited, but she couldn't help it. He'd just sent her another line of text, but the words were so typically Tom it was easy to image his voice saying them. _'You're relaxed, Sarah, I am enjoying it.'

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>She could almost see the smile that must have been on his face as he sent the message, the way that the right side of his mouth always stretched a bit further than the left. She closed her eyes and pictured him sitting on the bathroom floor beside the tub with that same look on his face; though in reality she wondered if he would ever really do so. Tom was willing to talk to her straight out of cryo, or in Infinity's showers, but any time she was even remotely unclothed at home he always averted his gaze. She wondered if it was for the same reason he always backed down from serious flirting. It was almost as if he was afraid of the temptation.<p>

Sarah then threw all that concern to the wind, and decided that if Tom really wanted her to be relaxed he wouldn't mind if she indulged her own fantasy. She imagined Tom sitting on the floor beside her, leaning against the side of the tub. His hand reaching out to touch her cheek gently, and she thought that his hands would probably be soft, lacking the rough feeling soldier's hands often gained from lifting weights, hand-to-hand sparring, or trips to the firing range. He would then lean forward and kiss her softly, lips dry and slightly cracked from the scrubbed air of a UNSC ship. Sarah's mouth dropped open as imagined what it would feel like if his tongue smoothly slid over hers. If his hand slid from her cheek and down her neck and Sarah moved her own hand to mimic the scenario playing in her head...

His hand ran along the line of her neck and traced along her collarbone slowly. Her head fell back as Tom broke the kiss and his mouth moved to her neck. His hand slid down her sternum and moved to cover her breast. She let out a low moan as he massaged the flesh slowly. His touch becoming more forceful as he got a feel for her body, and her moaning became louder as his thumb rubbed against her hardened nipple. Tom's mouth moved lower and Sarah arched her back, lifting her chest out of the water. His lips closed on the breast his hand wasn't already massaging and her sounds of pleasure became more intense.

It was difficult to pretend her hand was the same as Tom's mouth, but previous experience helped her imagination fill in the gaps. She distracted herself from the difference between what she was feeling and what Tom might feel like by continuing to picture him moving from her breast down to her stomach. His hand reached the crux of her body and her legs spread to give him access. His finger ran teasingly over the sensitive skin before he slowly slid a finger into her and she moaned louder than she ever would have dared if she was at home. It felt good to allow herself be as loud as she wanted, letting her body react without restrictions. At home she tried to stay quiet out of respect for Tom, and most of the men she'd been with in the past hadn't liked how vocal she could be - but none of those barriers existed here.

His finger started to set a slow and steady pace, each time exploring

just a little further. Her breathing became deep and her moaning almost constant as he worked her closer and closer to her climax. She then did something she would never do if she was at home: she moaned Tom's name, loudly. Any other time she wouldn't have dared say his name aloud, and certainly not as passionately as she could here in the privacy of her hotel room.

Unfortunately her fantasy was shattered as someone suddenly entered the bathroom and moved over to the sink. Sarah shot upright and her mind immediately turned to what she had at hand that could be used as a weapon. But she paused when she took a real look at the intruder, and realized that it was none other than Lasky. His back was to her as he scrubbed vigorously at something he was holding under the running faucet. She froze as she realized the situation she now found herself in and what this could mean. "...Tom?" she asked hesitantly, though he didn't respond. "Tom?" she asked again, but a bit louder.

Tom slowly lifted his head to look at her reflection in the mirror. Sarah slid back down in the bath so she was mostly covered by the water before she carefully removed her hands from her body. Tom stared at her reflection like a deer faced with a speeding eighteen-wheeler, whatever he had been rinsing forgotten in the sink. He was still wearing his dress pants and shirt from dinner, though his jacket was missing. She spotted a red stain on the sleeve of his shirt and Sarah immediately assumed the worst.

"Are you hurt?" she asked as she sat up fully, forgetting her previous attempt at modesty.

"No," Tom answered quickly, his gaze turning to the countertop. "I just spilled the... shit, it's probably all over the carpet." Tom shut off the faucet and suddenly left the room, leaving Sarah rather confused.

Sarah stayed seated in the tub for a few moments, trying to decide what to do. Tom wasn't injured so she wasn't in any rush to face him; particularly as she was sure he'd heard her moaning and practically shout his name. At this point part of her just wanted to disappear into the water, but her curiosity got the better of her. She got out of the bath, pulled the plug, and grabbed the robe hanging from a hook beside the door. She ignored the water that still clung to her body and moved out into the main room. She found Tom on his hands and knees, scrubbing at the floor. "Tom, what's going on?"

Tom looked over his shoulder and let out a long sigh before he got to his feet. "I'm sorry," he said as he set the cloth he'd been using to clean up the mess on top of the dining table. Sarah moved over and looked at the two glasses of wine that were also sitting there and the cake that was placed between them. There was a puddle of wine still on the tabletop, a red stain on the floor, and a plush toy penguin whose white stomach was also partially stained red. She looked to Tom, waiting for an explanation. He smiled a bit awkwardly. "Surprise, I guess."

Sarah raised an eyebrow and set her hands on her hips. "I thought my surprise was this room?"

"Well part of it is," Tom said as he reached down and picked up the stuffed penguin. "But so is all of this." He held it out to her and

Sarah took the gift. "I was looking for some souvenirs and then I saw that penguin and I knew I had to get it for you. Then I realized that you didn't have a birthday cake. So I made a stop at a bakery. Though I think I ruined it." He rubbed the back of his neck slightly as he looked to the ground.

Sarah looked over at the cake on the table, then down at the penguin and read the words 'City of Love' that were stitched across its stomach. She wasn't quite sure what to do. Tom's gesture was very sweet, but she was uneasy about the rest of the situation. She then decided that if Tom didn't bring up what she'd been doing in the bathtub she'd try to just ignore it as well. "So what kind of cake is it?"

The question seemed to give Tom something to focus on and he immediately seemed more at ease. "It's red velvet," he answered as he reached down and picked up a glass of wine, holding it out to her. "And this is Maury, which I was advised by a nice baker is a good choice to go with red velvet." Sarah accepted the glass, and Tom took the second one for himself.

"So you planned on breaking into my hotel room with cake, wine, and a stuffed animal...and then somehow ended up spilling wine all over the floor and yourself." Sarah shook her head in disappointment. "Good thing none of the crew can see you right now. You need to keep some semblance of authority." Fortunately, at that moment she suddenly remembered something she'd brought in her travel bag. "Take your shirt off," she instructed.

Tom stared at her for a second, clearly too stunned to speak for a moment before he got his composure back. "Spartan Palmer, are you trying to seduce me?"

"I'm a bigger fan of men chiseled out of stone, not toy soldiers," Sarah retorted. "Actually I have one of your old shirts I wear sometimes at night."

Tom was silent for longer than Sarah liked, and she wondered if he thought it was weird that she slept in his old clothing. "You like wearing my shirts?" Tom asked. There was something about the way he said it that seemed to project he was actually happy about it - maybe even enjoyed it in a way that wasn't entirely innocent. For a moment Sarah was caught off guard as the comment was not at all what she had expected from him.

She quickly jumped on what was the closest thing to an opening he'd ever given her. "I do. But the real question is: do you like me wearing your clothing?" Her voice was low and sultry and she took a step closer to him. "Because if you don't like it I suppose I could give them back. I'll just have to sleep naked instead." A blush crept onto his face, but he said nothing. Another closed door. "Now, take your shirt off."

"Seriously?" Tom asked, clearly reluctant.

"Stop being a child, Tom. It's nothing I haven't seen before. Don't make me strip you," Sarah threatened. Tom sighed and set down his glass of wine before he unbuttoned his shirt but Sarah put up a hand to stop him. "Slow down, I want to enjoy the show." Tom rolled his eyes, but she did notice he moved a bit slower as he returned to

removing the clothing. She watched as each button revealed more skin, and couldn't help herself as the thought of loosening her robe and pulling his body against hers crossed her mind.

Tom slid his shirt off and tossed it onto the couch. They stood for a few seconds, Sarah staring at his now bare chest. "So...about that shirt?" he said, raising an eyebrow.

"That can wait," Sarah said, brushing it off. "I'm craving some cake. What kind did you say it was again?" She moved around the table and sat down on the couch, being sure to sit on Tom's stained shirt.

Tom just seemed to accept the situation and scooted the cake across the table before he moved around to sit beside Sarah. "It's red velvet. I'm sorry if you don't like that flavor, but it sounded like the best option."

"I haven't had a cake that I didn't like," Sarah informed him as Tom cut into the dessert with a plastic knife and moved a slice onto a paper plate. He grabbed a fork and settled on the couch beside her. Tom carefully cut off a bit of the cake and held it out to Sarah. She ate the offered cake and closed her eyes as she let out a light sigh. She peeked at Tom from under her half-lidded gaze and she noticed he watching reaction closely.

"I take it I made the right choice," Tom took off another bite with the fork and ate it himself, nodding his head.

"The cake is good," Sarah admitted. "But I think I'm enjoying the company more." Tom smiled at her as he held up another piece of cake for her to eat.

"Didn't know that you Spartans could be so sentimental," Tom said. "Don't tell me you're going soft."

"Maybe I am," Sarah admitted, leaning forward to grab her glass from the table. "I think it's Infinity's XO. The man is as soft as a marshmallow, and just as sweet." She sipped at her wine as Tom chuckled at the comment. "Usually I'd go for the battle-hardened marines, but there's something about him that I would love to put my hands on."

Tom leaned forward and sat the partially finished slice of cake on the table before reaching for his own glass of wine. Another retreat. He took a sip of his drink and paused for a moment, giving Sarah some hope that maybe he was considering not turning tail. "So how was your bath? As good as you were hoping?" He seemed hesitant in spite of the casual topic, and his tone was somewhat awkward.

Again Sarah wondered just how much he had heard while she was in the bathroom; but facing the fact that she'd been masturbating to the shirtless man beside her wasn't something she wanted to bring up at the moment. "It was perfect, exactly what I wanted." Sarah shifted on the couch and closer to Tom. "Thank you, again, for all of this. No one has ever done something this nice for me, and I feel bad that you've spent so much money."

"Oh, I didn't actually have to spend anything for the reservation here," Tom informed her between sips of his wine. "I payed for the dinner, the cake, and the penguin I stupidly ruined - but not the

hotel room."

"How did you manage that? I know you and I'm sure you didn't pull a 'I'm second-in-command of the UNSC's biggest ship'." Sarah had gone to enough dinners and been given the short end of the stick enough on slights to know Tom didn't pull strings.

"This place has owed me a free room for about two years. I had a girlfriend a while back and we went to London for a vacation, like a last chance to save our relationship. She bitched and complained constantly about the place we stayed at, so the hotel credited me a room of my choice at any of their branches. I never had a need for it, but when I found out about your birthday and realized where we would be docking I knew what to do. I figured you'd enjoy a weekend in Paris, and decided I'd take you to dinner too so it would be more personal...and because if it was a completely free gift, that would be pretty cheap."

Sarah leaned over so that her shoulder touched his. "Smart and thrifty. You're quite the catch, Thomas Lasky. You're too kind to me." Sarah leaned over to kiss his cheek but Tom suddenly turned slightly toward her and she froze. If he moved just a little more he'd need only to lean forward a few centimeters and his lips would touch hers. He flinched, as though he was going to do it, close the space between them - but he turned away and instead took another drink from his glass. Sarah sighed, but leaned over and kissed his cheek anyway; lingering a bit longer than usual before she pulled back.

Tom just stared at his glass of wine, avoiding her eyes. Sarah watched him for a moment, and then let out a long groan. "You know what; if you aren't going to swing the bat, then don't walk up to the plate." Tom looked to Sarah then, and it was clear that he didn't understand her. "Don't flirt with me if you aren't interested in doing anything else," she said bluntly. She was tired of the run-around. Tom opened his mouth to argue but stopped, much to Sarah's annoyance. "Why do you always retreat? What exactly are you so afraid of? I find you attractive and I'm more than willing. You're attracted to me too, aren't you?"

Tom stayed silent, which stung Sarah in a way she hadn't expected. He'd seemed interested in her, shown her attention and purveyed an attitude of wanting to be closer to her. But never made it clear if what he felt for her was friendship or something more. And now he couldn't even muster a simple 'yes' or a 'no'. He turned his gaze away from her and tried to stutter out a response. "I don't...I'm sorry...I didn't mean..." He then let out a long breath and gave up on arguing completely.

Sarah suddenly felt more embarrassed than she ever had been in a long time. She was a Spartan, not one to run from anything - but Tom wasn't something she could fight, and she didn't know how else to handle feeling like such a fool. She needed to get away. Sarah stood and Tom didn't react, which was probably a mercy. "I'm going to turn in for the night." She moved over to her bag and quickly grabbed her sleepwear before making her way to the bathroom. She shut the door behind her, needing something solid between her and Tom.

She moved over to the sink and looked at herself in the mirror, realizing that she'd forgotten to wash off her makeup after dinner.

She felt like a moron for still having it on and not even noticing. Sarah turned on the water and grabbed a towel, wetting it before she started to scrub at her face. She glanced up at her reflection again and really took a good look at herself. She felt even more ridiculous for thinking Tom had actually been interested in her. She'd seen the women that he brought home before. They were shorter than him, often had long blond hair, and slim but still with womanly curves. All the things Sarah was not. She heard movement in the main room but ignored it, hoping that if she waited long enough Tom would just leave and they'd both forget he had ever come to her room that night.

There was a knock on the bathroom door and Sarah cursed under her breath. She didn't need to be jerked around like this. She looked over to the toilet where she'd tossed her pajamas and spotted the shirt that she'd told Tom she'd give him. "Shirt's on the toilet," she said loud enough that Tom could hear her.

The door opened and Sarah stared down at the sink to avoid meeting Tom's gaze. "I don't want the shirt." Tom said as he moved into the room to stand beside her.

"Then what do you want?" Sarah asked, starting to get annoyed.

Tom's hand suddenly touched her cheek and she turned to him to tell him to leave her be, but he stretched up before she could say anything and brought his lips to hers. His other hand moved to the back of her neck while the hand on her cheek slipped to her hip and pulled her closer. She was surprised by the force of it and how quickly his tongue found its way into her mouth. What she wasn't surprised by was how quickly how her own mouth opened to allow him access. His lips were slightly cracked as she had imagined, but his exploration was more urgent than she had expected. Luckily with almost a year of pent up frustration she didn't find it hard to match his enthusiasm as her fingers threaded into his hair and she placed a hand on his lower back. She'd touched Tom before, given him a neck rub while sitting on the couch at home, spread ointment on his back for his allergic rashes, things like that. But she'd never touched him in an intimate situation and his skin felt much different in the new context.

Tom's pulled away from her and for a moment she thought he was backing off again, but a tug on her waist made it clear she should follow his lead. They made their way out of the bathroom, half stumbling in an effort to break as little physical contact as possible. Sarah's leg hit then the edge of the bed and they broke the kiss to sit down before they continued. Tom didn't miss a beat, dipping his mouth down to her neck. He pushed her down onto the bed and positioned himself so he was leaning over her, his hands moving to her waist. His teeth scraped over her skin and Sarah muffled a moan, one hand moving to his side and other wrapping around to his back.

Tom suddenly removed his mouth and leaned up to set his forehead against hers. "Don't do that," Tom instructed. His voice was deep and it sent a shiver down her spine. She hadn't known that he could sound like that, all husky and breathy. It wasn't that Tom wasn't manly, but his voice was usually lighter, more youthful than seemed fair at his age but this was something completely different. He kissed her before dipped his head to brush his lips against her ear. "I wanna hear you," he said before nipping at her earlobe. Sarah was

surprised; she'd never had a man request that she be anything other than quiet. Tom moved his head back down, returning his attention to her neck. His hands moved along her waist until he reached the tie that was holding her robe in place. She felt his hands smooth over the cloth until he reached the knot, fumbling with it until it finally came loose. He pushed the robe apart and she shivered as the cold air rushed over her skin.

Tom's hands moved higher, covering her breasts and giving them an explorative squeeze. Sarah stopped her own reflex to keep her voice down, letting the ensuing sigh come out loud and clear. Tom squeezed harder and he shifted so that he was on his knees, with one leg between hers. His mouth suddenly moved from her neck to her breast, eliciting another, louder moan from her. Tom groaned himself, though it was muffled against her skin as his mouth latched onto her nipple. One of Sarah's hands moved his head and her fingers pressed into his scalp. He shifted his leg to press his thigh against hers, letting her feel the bulge of his cock through the fabric of his pants. Sarah moved her leg up to rub against him and he moved his hips to mimic the action.

Tom lifted his head from her chest and let out a deep moan as he rubbed his body against hers more fervently. She could feel his breath rushing over her skin. She lifted her head to look down at him as he looked up at her and into her eyes. "Do you have a condom?" he asked.

Sarah paused for a moment when she realized that she didn't, and she always insisted on using them. Though she didn't want Tom to leave to go get one and risk him having second thoughts. Not when she was so close to finally getting what she wanted. And from the aching feeling between her legs she wasn't going to be able to handle only getting the job half done. "We don't need one," she answered. She knew Tom, and she knew he was always careful as well when it came to sex. "I trust you."

Tom looked at her for a second before he smiled and slid his free hand down her side, scraping his nails over her skin lightly. "What about lubricant?"

"I've got that covered already," Sarah informed him. Tom shifted his hand down further, keeping his eyes on hers. His fingers touched her sensitive lips and she let out a sound that was something between a moan and a gasp. It had been too long since she hadn't had control over the fingers touching her there. His finger slipped into her with relative ease and Sarah let her head fall back and a loud moan slip out.

"You certainly do have it covered," Tom commented before he removed his finger. Sarah let out a sound of annoyance and Tom laughed lightly. "And impatient," he muttered before he lifted his hand and slipped his finger into his mouth. Sarah didn't know why'd he'd want to do that but he closed his eyes, withdrew his finger and smiled. Tom slipped off of the bed and Sarah sat up, curious as to what he was going to do next. She was given an answer as to what his intentions were as he undid the buckle of his belt.

Tom removed belt and pulled his pants down, giving Sarah her first look at him when he was fully aroused. She'd seen him in Infinity's showers and she'd caught glimpses of him naked at their apartment but

she'd never seen him erect. And she certainly wasn't disappointed. He let his pants fall around his ankles before he moved back onto the bed. He kissed her continuously, stopping only long enough to kick off his shoes and shake his pants the rest of the way off. Sarah weaved her fingers into his hair and lightly scratched her nails along his lower back as he settled himself between her legs. He had one hand on the bed and the other moved down to guide his cock. He pushed forward until the head of his length touched her sex and her nails dug into whatever flesh was under them, her body tensing in anticipation. Tom broke their kissing, shifting to whisper in her ear. "Tell me if there's any discomfort."

Sarah decided not to point out that he wasn't so impressive that she'd have trouble, as she didn't think that Tom would take the tease as anything other than an insult. "Give it to me, Tom," Sarah whispered instead in response. Tom shifted into a position that allowed him a better range of motion, though it meant that he could only set his forehead against her shoulder due to their height difference. He pushed his hips forward and Sarah moaned loudly as he slowly sank himself into her. Sarah let her head fall back onto the mattress and was free with her voice as Tom started to push himself in and out. Sarah had expected Tom to be a slow and cautious lover, but the pace he set was fast and urgent. Sarah's toes curled and she spread her legs a bit wider to allow him more access as he drove them toward their climax. Her body rose up to meet his thrusts as she grew closer and closer to her finish.

She was so lost in enjoying the build-up that her orgasm caught her off guard. Sarah called out Tom's name as her body shuddered with pleasure and contracted. Tom continued his thrusting, focused on achieving his own climax while she wrapped her arms around him and reveled in her own ebbing waves of pleasure and the heavy breathing and grunts of her partner. Tom pushed himself deep into her as he found his own release and spilled himself inside her. He held himself over her for a few seconds, panting to catch his breath before he finally pulled out and collapsed onto the bed beside her. Sarah knew that without her augmentations she'd be feeling as tired as him, but her lungs processed each breath better than his could and although her heart was beating rapidly she felt no ensuing exhaustion.

"Enjoy yourself?" Sarah asked turning her head to look at Tom, who only nodded in response, still too overwhelmed to speak. "So it wasn't that bad?"

"It was amazing," Tom answered between deep breathes. "Did you not enjoy it?"

"Oh, I certainly did," Sarah responded with a smirk. "I'd forgotten that sex could feel that good. In fact I was a little worried the augmentations would make it impossible."

Tom looked at her for a few seconds, his brow furrowed. "Are you telling me that you haven't had sex since your augmentations?"

"I told you no one wants to climb this mountain," Sarah reminded him. "And don't you say what I know you're going to say." Tom raised an eyebrow at the comment and she rolled her eyes. "You're going to say something about how I deserve to have a man service me every night."

"Well I wouldn't be lying," Tom pointed out.

"Then why did you hesitate to sleep with me? Did you think it was going to be bad?" Sarah asked, still not sure why he'd been backing down for so long when he'd put so much passion into having sex with her just now.

Tom sighed and rolled onto his side, reaching out to run his fingers lightly along her arm. "I knew the sex would be amazing," he answered, further confusing Sarah. "But I also knew that this wouldn't just be sex for me. And I was right; this wasn't just a fuck-and-run. And that's exactly what I was afraid of. "

"Is the possibility of having something deeper than a one night stand with me really that scary? It's certainly something I'd like," Sarah admitted to him. "Why are you afraid of that?"

"Because we're both mortal," was Tom's answer as he continued to caress her skin. "I told you about Corbulo and the battle of Circinus IV, right?" Sarah nodded, not really sure what that had to do with anything. "You know that a lot of people died that night - my instructors, my classmates, and my friends. Well, one of them was someone I had feelings for. I was only sixteen, and watched as she died in my arms and there was nothing I could do. I learned a long time ago that you shouldn't let yourself get involved with other soldiers." He sat up, leaning on his forearm and holding himself partially over her. "You know how dangerous your job is, and can you really see this ending in anything other than pain?"

"Of course it is," Sarah admitted, shrugging slightly. "But everything good in life usually does. Nothing is ever happy all the time, and no happiness lasts forever. That's no reason to avoid all the joys that you could still have."

"I would think you, as a former ODST, would understand what I'm talking about," Tom said, clearly surprised by her words.

"First, there's no such thing as a former ODST - only an ODST in different clothing. Second, I can't understand what you're talking about at all. Maybe that's how you officers view things, sitting up there on your ships away from the gunfire; but down in the dirt Marines take every chance at happiness we can get. Each encounter could be out last. Would you really want to be bleeding-out in the middle of a broken down building somewhere and have only your regrets over all the chances for happiness you passed up to keep you company?" Tom turned his gaze to the bed, seeming afraid to meet her gaze.

Tom let out a laugh and shook his head. "See, this is exactly what I meant. This isn't just a night in Paris, because what I feel for you is deeper than just lust. And I knew that if I ended up in your bed that one night would never be enough. And that is precisely why I'm scared. You'll never be happy out of combat, and one day that will catch up to us."

"You say that like you already know what going to kill me. You do realize that even people who aren't soldiers can still die and leave their loved ones heartbroken, right?" Sarah said, trying to lighten the mood a little. "So unless you are planning on being alone for the rest of your life, you can't really escape that risk." She reached up

and gently touched his chest. "So...will you stay the weekend?"

"If I do then I'll need somewhere to stay," Tom said, smiling before he leaned down to kiss her. "Can we move to a more comfortable position?"

"Sure," Sarah agreed, sitting up. "If you think you have the energy." She crawled up the bed to the pillows and laid down on her side, soon joined by Tom. She settled in against him and Tom wrapped his arms around her. Sarah then rested her head on his shoulder and placed a hand on his chest as she let herself relax in his company.

"So," Tom said, his hand running absently up and down her back. "Which was better; you imagining me fingering you, or me doing it for real?"

"It's not really a fair comparison," Sarah responded, trying to ignore the embarrassment she still felt about him overhearing her earlier ministrations. Not that she should really feel that way now, as she had been even louder when they were having sex. "Dick will always be better than fingers, so you'll have to finger me in a tub sometime if you want me to give you an accurate answer to that particular question."

"Well we'll have to find the time this weekend to run a proper test." Tom nuzzled against her hair and held her tighter. "Though if you make sounds like you did in the bath earlier, we better leave room for me to join you."

"Do you really like me being loud like that?" Sarah asked, still not quite believing that it didn't annoy him like it did the other men she'd been with. "The women you usually bring home aren't so loud."

"If it were socially acceptable to, while flirting with a woman, to ask her to moan as loud as she could I would do it. And then I wouldn't have ended up bringing most of those women home as a result. Besides, by the time you're both naked it's a bit late to abort due to volume," he pointed out.

"If you want them to be loud, why not ask them to be louder?" Sarah asked.

"How are they not going to take offense at that? That's like in the middle of sex telling someone that they don't sound like they're enjoying it enough. There is no way that that's going to end well."

"You asked me and it seems to have turned out fine," Sarah pointed out.

"I asked you because I already knew that you could make louder noises," Tom countered. "That's not the same as asking a woman I don't know."

"Well if you really like it then I guess I'll try to keep that in mind in the future." Sarah moved her hand around Tom's body to wrap her arm around his back. "Anything else I should know that gets your rocks off?"

"I like shower sex," Tom answered, pausing for a moment. "I've also got a weak spot for blow jobs, but we can address that when the time comes. Other than my love for the sounds you make and their volume that's it. How about you? Got any kinks I should be aware of?"

"I don't like using the same position two times in a row," was Sarah's response. "Each time you put your cock in me it should be in a different. I'm fine with almost anything except anal, I don't do that."

"Works for me, I'm not interested in that either," Tom said absently. "Don't get me wrong - your ass is a thing of beauty, and I can't wait to do you from behind, but I've got no interest in putting anything in it. Maybe some squeezing or digging my nails in, but that's it." Tom's hand moved down her spine and he sighed as his hand stopped at her lower back. "I love that you're taller than me, but I hate that I can't reach that ass." Sarah laughed at the comment and Tom loosened his grip on her so he could scoot down on the bed and be at eye level with her. Sarah's finger curled unconsciously at the feeling of his chest rubbing against her breasts and Tom grinned with satisfaction. "So is there anything else I should know?" Sarah hesitated, not sure how he might take what she would tell him next. The only other boyfriend she'd ever told about it had taken it as an insult. Tom raised an eyebrow and moved his head forward to rest his forehead against hers. "Come on, Sarah, nothing you can tell me could be worse than me spilling wine on your carpet because your moaning had me daydreaming."

Sarah furrowed her brow, suddenly making the connection. "What? So that's why there's wine on my carpet?"

Tom blushed slightly and Sarah smiled at how young it made him look. "Yeah," he admitted with a light chuckle followed by a long sigh. "I was pouring the wine while you were...entertaining yourself. And then you moaned my name. I got distracted, and was considering what it would be like to march into that bathroom and replace your fingers with mine so I could hear those moans up close and personal when the wine ended up on the carpet." Tom averted his eyes for a second before he looked back to her. "So if I can admit that to you, then I think you can tell me what other thing you'd like to try in bed."

Sarah paused for a moment before she finally relented. "I don't know if I actually like it, but..." she started. "I'd like to try role playing." She braced herself for whatever Tom's reaction would be. She worried that he'd either think she was weird or that she thought he was boring in bed and be offended.

Tom pursed his lips and was quiet for a moment before he let out a long breath. "Well, if we're going to role play we should probably wait until we're more comfortable and know each other's needs better. And we probably want to choose a scenario that's not too far from home so that we're most comfortable our first time."

Sarah just stared at him, stunned at his words. She hadn't expected him to be so open to the idea. "You really want to do it?"

"I'll try almost anything once," Tom replied, with that lop-sided smile Sarah loved so much. "As long as it's not anything that causes pain. That's not really my style."

"Mine neither. I get enough pain from my job." Sarah smiled and moved to quickly kiss him.

"So is that all?" Tom asked. Sarah nodded her head before she moved closer to him and cuddled against his chest. Tom readjusted his grip on her in turn and they settled in to a content silence. Sarah listened to his heartbeat slow down as Tom drifted off to sleep, and soon she closed her own eyes. She had often wondered recently what it would be like to fall asleep in Tom's arms; and like everything else about being intimate with him, it wasn't what she expected. His embrace was strong and protective, and his presence gave her a sense of security she'd never really felt with any other man before. He was also warm and Sarah nuzzled in a bit closer to his body, letting the comfort sink into her and lull her into her own peaceful slumber.

End
file.